THE Hudson REVIEW

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT:
A Defense of Fiction

JEROME M. IRVING:
A Parting Visit with Robert Frost

THORNTON WILDER:
Bruno's Last Meal in Finnegans Wake

JUAN GOYTISOLO:
The Cross and the Face—a story

SIDNEY MONAS:
Ehrenburg's Life, Solzhenitsyn's Day

Poems by RICHMOND LATTIMORE, THEODORE ROETHKE, PETER DALE SCOTT.

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The Hudson Review

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Notes on Contributors

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT's essay in this issue will appear, in somewhat altered form, as a preface to an anthology of long stories, *Types of Prose Fiction,* to be published this year by Random House.

RICHMOND LATTIMORE's translation of *The Frogs* shared the latest Bollingen Award for verse translation. Other recent publications have been a book of poems, *Sestina for a Far-Off Summer,* and a translation of *The Revelation of John.*

The press conference with Robert Frost attended by JEROME M. IRVING was arranged by Professor Peter J. Stanlis of the University of Detroit.

JUAN GOYTISOLO is a young Spanish novelist born in Barcelona but now living in Paris because of his opposition to the present regime in Spain.

PETER DALE SCOTT teaches at the University of California (Berkeley), where he is writing a study of Latin pastoral at the court of Charlemagne. He was formerly a Canadian diplomat in Warsaw.

THORNTON WILDER's article in this issue originally appeared in issue No. 6 of *A Wake Newslitter,* a mimeographed publication for Joyce specialists edited by Fritz Senn in Switzerland and Clive Hart in Australia. It is reprinted here by the kind permission of the author and *A Wake Newslitter.*

A collection of essays by JOHN SIMON entitled *Acid Test* will be published in May by Stein & Day.

NORMAN N. HOLLAND's *The Shakespearean Imagination* will be published this summer.

HILTON KRAMER, former editor of *Arts* magazine, lectures on art at Bennington College.

The Paris Letter in this issue is the first in a series by the distinguished French man of letters, AIMÉ PATRI.

(Continued on page 111)

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GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

A Defense of Fiction

I

> Said the most prudent Cide Hamete to his pen: "For me alone Don Quixote was born and I for him. His was the power of action, mine of writing. Only we two are at one."
>
> —Cervantes

THE KINDS OF FICTION are more various and less clearly defined than most critical theorists allow. In English, the language in which there is the largest body of fiction criticism, the dominant ideas and attitudes derive chiefly from Henry James, both from his critical writings and from his novels and stories used as exemplars. Currently, fiction criticism has also been influenced by that school of close textual exegesis known as The New Criticism, the chief applications of which have been neither to prose nor to narrative but to highly compact and intellectually tough passages of non-narrative poetry. James's limitations as a critic can hardly be held against him as a novelist; it is not surprising for an artist's best speculations to explore his own practice. But that Percy Lubbock, the prime apostle of Jamesianism, should have narrowed rather than widened the theory was unfortunate; and that more recently The New Criticism has encouraged critics of fiction to study the creative power of words at the expense of their designative power has proved no less unfortunate. The combination of these two has produced a body of attitudes and assumptions too constrictive altogether. If these congeal into dogma, as they threaten to do in the United States at least, then both the reading and the writing of fiction will have been damaged cruelly.

According to this incipient dogma, the Fathers of the art of fiction are Flaubert and James. T. S. Eliot's observations on fiction have been vastly inferior to his insights into poetry and their influence has been in good part pernicious. In his review of *Ulysses* in 1923 he wrote, "The novel ended with Flaubert and James," and Eliotic critics have felt free for a generation to say that the

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novel is dead. The mangled truth in Eliot's statement is that the realistic novel reached something like formal perfection in Flaubert and James. Allen Tate spells this formalism out. In his essay on Flaubert he says that Flaubert "created modern fiction" and that "it has been through Flaubert that the novel has at last caught up with poetry." One gasps, and thinks of poor old Cervantes stumbling behind the poets, of unconscious Sterne, of artless Jane Austen. Tate also says of a passage he quotes from *Madame Bovary:* "The action is not stated from the point of view of the author; it is rendered in terms of situation and scene. To have made this the viable property of the art of fiction was to have virtually made the art of fiction. And that, I think, is our debt to Flaubert." There is a certain truth to this, if it is hedged about with the proper reservations: Flaubert speaks in his own voice sometimes and he surely has a discernibly satiric point of view in the book; one could find in earlier novels hundreds of passages which are similarly "rendered" (James's term); the term "realistic" must be prefixed to the word "fiction." It is because the proper reservations are commonly lacking that such portentous judgments as these, enunciated by a good many of the high priests of contemporary criticism, threaten to become dogma.

To be sure, within its boundaries, contemporary criticism of fiction has produced some excellent studies. Such an essay as "Technique as Discovery" by Mark Schorer would not have come into being without the assumptions both of Jamesianism and of the new exegesis, and it is surely criticism of a high order. Yet if one wanders too long in the privet-hedge maze of James's fiction, elegant and spacious though it is, or if one establishes residence for long in the subtle, manicured shire of Jamesianism, one's judgment becomes liable to a number of eccentricities. There, a killing will probably not be performed with anything as direct and ordinary as Raskolnikov's hatchet but with glances and words; and if it is someone low like Emma Bovary who dies, the plain pathos of the death may scarcely be as important as the victim's vulgarity. There, the characters' taste and the writer's artistry matter more than their goodness or wisdom; the great truth-seeking and truth-telling Russians, Tolstoy, Dostoievsky, and Chekhov, are acknowledged and passed by, for most of the structures they made are rather clumsy and none of them are esoteric. There, the sublim-

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ities of human experience—the heights of forgiveness, the light of steadfastness, the deep murk of blame—exist by projection of the small, for the language of irony and indirection is preferred there to the fulfilled, fulfilling language of the heart. One could live there a lifetime under the illusion that Joyce wrote, not one kind of beautiful short story, but *the* kind; that *Tristram Shandy* and *Don Quixote,* though marvels, are somehow not to be taken seriously as works of art; that *The Betrothed* should be mentioned with politeness (if ever) only out of regard for the patriotic feelings of Italians; that Rabelais, *Pilgrim's Progress,* and *The Morte D'Arthur* exist as sources, precursors, Neanderthal novels, and that *Njal's Saga* and *The Tale of Genji,* those inconvenient masterworks, do not exist at all.

One purpose of this essay is to suggest an ampler way of talking about fiction. Four main types of stories are sketched in, four loose categories no one of which is assumed to be superior to any other. There is nothing holy about categorizing. The writing and reading of fiction, the saying and hearing of stories, got along splendidly for eons with as muddy a set of categories as any in literary criticism. But the taxonomic process, once started, cannot easily be reversed. A too rigid way of talking about a kind of literature can interfere with the main thing, which is the pleasure, the writer-and-reader intercourse, the dialogue. Here are two examples of contemporary dogma. *A short story should ideally end in an epiphany. The true novel is realistic and coherent in all its parts.* Such provincialism falsifies expectation, blurs distinctions, and helps harden the heart. If readers and writers are to be conscious and self-conscious about the arts of story-telling, very well, let them appreciate all the kinds and not just one, superb though that one may be.

Tale, short story, science fiction, narrative satire, novel of manners, novella/novelette/short novel/nouvelle/long short story, novel of ideas, thriller, romance, character sketch, picaresque novel, fable, fiction of sensibility, psychological/sociological/biographical/historical/philosophical/political/ ethical novels, saint's life, Gothic romance, confession, bildungsroman, roman à clef, detective story, parable, realistic/naturalistic/symbolic/fantastic/expressionistic/poetic/analytic/scenic fiction, adventure story, homily, novel of loosely connected stories, epic novel, allegory, saga,

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. . . There is no use trying to systematize all this. The categorizing of drama, a form incomparably tighter and less fluid than fiction, has not advanced very much beyond Aristotle. We have accumulated a great many names for plays since his day, but we do not understand the nature of the types of plays for which these names stand a fraction as well as we understand tragedy and comedy. For fiction, the only such guide I know of is Northrop Frye in the essay on the types of fiction in *The Anatomy of Criticism*. His fourfold division provides the frame to this essay.

A narrative may look like an account of actual happenings (realistic fiction) or even be one (autobiography); yet it must be as wholly imagined as the tallest tale if it is to succeed. The fiction may propose ideas (anatomy and satire) or it may seem to be as empty of ideas as a dream (romance). Ultimately my thesis is that a good story is a narrative fantasy which generates an imaginative reality and incarnates an idea of moral reality.

II

> My lords, if you would hear a high tale of love and of death, here is that of Tristan and Iseult.
> —Belloc's translation of Bédier's *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult*

I imagine that the impulse to tell stories is as natural, and hence as little in need of justification, as is the impulse to dance, and I take the listener as female to the sayer's male, the desire of each needing the other for completion. I imagine further that the impulse to tell a story like most impulses is not clear-cut and fixed but blends with several other primitive impulses, sometimes one at a time but usually in combinations of every imaginable sort and degree. Of these the impulse to sing is pure and indisputable; a ballad is a story sung, and almost every song has the germ, or the vestige, of a story in it. I imagine there to be four other important impulses that mingle with the story-teller's: to dream, to tell what happened, to explain the nature of things, and to make a likeness. I take them up in this order, which I imagine to be the order of their sophistication.

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1. Tale and Romance

> . . . as I slept I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold I saw . . . —*Pilgrim's Progress*

So begins the greatest of prose allegories. It says it is a dream as many narratives do, but more than most it affects the reader somewhat as a dream does. Kafka wrote more dream-like stories than Bunyan, for he was less impelled to instruct and advise the reader, to interpret the dream as it went along. Some of *The Thousand and One Nights* are even more purely dream-like than Kafka's tales; they do not compel interpretation at all but exist in and of themselves. Yet they can be analyzed by an external, imposed set of principles (such as psycho-analysis) pretty much as dreams can be, and if they are good they may reveal something of the truth. It is the fantasist's alchemy to obey the obscure laws of dream and of story at once, in such a way that his words will stimulate the same fantasy in the reader. If you recount to your friend what you dreamt last night, he will not dream it but merely look at it. If your tale-telling and dreaming impulses become one so that the dream is created while the story is being told, then he may not only look at your fantasy but imagine it as well. "La poésie," said Sainte-Beuve, "ne consiste pas à tout dire, mais à tout faire rêver."

My contention is that a good tale is like a dream, is unlike a dream, and touches the truth.

Here are some of the ways in which a narrative fantasy is like a dream. The people and images it evokes are vivid and particular. It is not despair that Christian has to deal with, but Giant Despair of Doubting Castle, who falls into fits even on sunshiny days. It is not by intellectual speculation that K tries to discover what the Castle wants him to do, but by picking up and talking into as actual a telephone as exists in literature. Fantasy images are particular, solid, immediate; yet around them there hovers a penumbra of significance. Whether a cup is as symbolic as the Grail, a scientist as representative as Frankenstein, the hero as loosely archetypal a lost-king's-son as Tom Jones, the plight as phosphorescent with anxiety as that of "The Pit and the Pendulum," this is certain: nothing is there just because in ordinary life

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it would happen so to occur or so to appear. The fantasy puts disjunct parts of the world together in its own way, into a thing radically different from the visible world. This is done partly in play, as a relief from the tedium of life, for escape. In a good fantasy it is also done as a way of saying that the invisible world is not like the world we see and commonly live in but *thus*. Identity is impermanent: substitution, metamorphosis, disguise are the stock in trade of romance. In "Kamar-al-zaman" the hero's father, the king, fades out of the tale, but there fades in a guardian old man upon whose death Kamar-al-zaman has power to become king in a new land and in his own home.

In romances, in tales, in dream-like stories, all things are pure and highly colored. The moon is not at the three quarters and dulled by dust in the air, the third son wins, an infusion of herbs causes life-long love. Especially motives appear to be clear: malice, fidelity, courage, desire, revenge, all the types of human impulse unpolluted. Desire is gratified or grandly thwarted but does not just peter out, evil abounds but is recognized and justice triumphs, anguish is not interrupted by mosquito bites. Most of all, there is the sense that matters have to be thus; there are laws, some strange, some obscure, many usual, which cause and explain everything. Outrageous coincidence is unexceptional in fantasy plots because we feel secure that what seems to be coincidence is really immanent destiny (in a poor fantasy, the sense of destiny pejorates to a suspicion of author manipulation). The dream-like sense of necessity, whether it is compulsive as in Kafka or easy and drifting as in *The Thousand and One Nights,* comes from no naturalism, no natural determinism, for that philosophy holds that there is nothing moral about any decision; it comes from the sense that, no matter how hard the hero strives, the jinn, the Gentlemen of the Castle, the gods, will make most of the important decisions at their whim, will reward and punish according to a code humane (and therefore moral) only from time to time. It was not because of something he knew he had done or had meant to do that Joseph K was accused and shot; in the Grimms' tale the dead girl's arm would quit growing from her grave only when her mother came to beat it with a stick.

It is not only because the laws of that world are strange that we feel released when we are in it. It is also because there we are

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dreamily removed from the uncertainties of choice. *If I were in his place it would be clear to me what I ought to do.* How refreshingly strange. *Yet I know that whatever I choose to do the outcome of the event will probably be determined by powers I do not understand or of whose existence I may not even be aware.* How familiar, how true.

Even the purest fantasy story is as unlike as it is like a dream. The dreamer has none of that distance from his dream which both teller and hearer have from a tale. Distance is one of the great goods of fiction—that distance midway between the abstractness of essay and the confrontation of drama, a wonderland distance permitting both a kind of extreme intimacy with characters and also a panorama of generations, both the full cold light of analysis and some of the heat of scene. The dream's images are so vivid and its emotions so pure, and at the same time the dreamer's consciousness is so dim, that the dream becomes reality for the dreamer: to dream is to be a solipsist. On the other hand even a girl with *Dracula* in her hand at midnight, afraid to turn out the light and go to bed, knows as she stares at the billowing curtains that it is a book she holds and that this is her room she is in; if she loses herself further, if she mistakes a brother's snore in the next room for a vampire's chuckle, one says her state of mind is mildly pathological. For a reader not abnormally given to hallucinating, the images evoked by words simply are not so present to the mind, so immediate, as those of a dream, and if he is not hysterical his emotions are inhibited by his controlling consciousness. Psychologists conjecture that people can die of terror in their sleep. Who ever heard of someone's dying of terror while listening to a story? The girl fears going to bed because *Dracula* might stimulate such dreams as would terrify her too much.

A crucial difference between dream and story is language. A dream does not have to use language; most dreams do in fact use it but not necessarily in the way a story-teller must. Each person is given language by his community, by those before and about him, and among sane people only the dreamer is released from the responsibility of giving language back to those about him in recognizable form; in this respect dreaming is a kind of holiday from sanity, a region where "sinkboard" may inspire him with horror,

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"good morning" mean nothing, or "fiersh deply" fill him with erotic yearning. *Finnegans Wake,* a word-dream by the most solipsistic of writers, transforms language as freely as a dream does. In it, character, place, story dissolve and words metamorphose. Those who understand the book call it literature; yet so few will ever be able to understand it—and to do so they must so submit to Joyce's will—that the community who gave Joyce his language will never listen or even want to listen for long to what he has done to the language, marvelous though it may be. Insofar as a sayer's language is not understood by those to whom he is returning it, he has failed. If he is returning it only to a cabal, then one calls his writing esotericism, the justification for which is that there is no public language available for what he knows. Of *Finnegans Wake* a sympathetic judgment is that it is a book of esoteric beauty and wisdom, the very form of which demonstrates its basic assumption: the realer one's knowledge the more private it is and the less one can communicate it with common words in normal syntax. A harsh judgment is that the book is neither story nor poem nor dream but a pseudo-dream based on a lie; a lie because some of one's realest knowledge has come through stories which have communicated no less miraculously for being in the common tongue. Among these none is greater than *Don Quixote,* which flowers from an assumption to which Joyce's is hostile. Cervantes assumes that, even as false or trivial dreams (like the romances that addled the Don's wits) reduce reality and as noble dreams (like Don Quixote's own) heighten it, so a literary analogue to a dream of the truth (like *Don Quixote* itself, unlike *Finnegans Wake*) magnifies reality by creating a communion of readers.

A good tale is seldom as purely fantastic as "Kamar-al-zaman," for usually the teller is moved also by the impulse to teach. The power of the teaching depends in good part on how intricately it has become the tale. No doubt Swift intended the story in *Gulliver's Travels* as a sort of vehicle separate from his message, and of course to some extent the two are separable. But Swift speaks better indirectly than directly, is more tale-teller than philosopher: most of the power lies in the story. In the dreadful fourth voyage, that deepest of all excursions into misanthropy, the more potent

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meaning is to be found not in the message but in the story. Overtly Swift meant that reason is vile man's one hope; but reason is exemplified in the Houyhnhnms, and the vapidity of their fictional effect quite undoes his conscious message. If the Houyhnhnms are the best we can hope for, why bother? For a natural story-teller the truth he has to tell forms what he imagines to have happened, however much he may have intended, like Swift or Bunyan, to separate his message from the fantasy. A good story is the figure of a truth, but that truth is not always the author's consciously intended message.

Conversely, truth embodied in a story has a power it has in no other form. Jesus did not write theology but told many stories, and we know him by the four versions of the story of his life. Moreover, unlike essay, fiction is not in danger of defining the truth too strictly. Who knows how many diverse sermons and exegeses have been stimulated by the story of Abraham and Isaac, each intended to expose *the* truth hidden in that story?

Fiction does not deal very much with those clear, definable sorts of truth which like the circulation of blood are merely tricky to expose or which like the law of gravity explain the behavior of things by a formula. Isolated, such formulas as stories yield may be wise and subtle but more likely are limp and obvious: "We should love one another," "You should change your life." Fiction deals with truths which, like love, are fully there only in the creation. If psychology, moral philosophy, and sociology among them could manage to encapsulate the truths of our behavior in accurate formulas, there would be no further use for story except to amuse. But the contingencies of life, the possible combinations of factors, are too various. A man may know all the wise formulas about love but until he has loved he has not possessed their wisdom. It is a wonder of fiction that it can both create and formulate truths for our possession. My fantasy love for Tess of the d'Urbervilles put me in possession of something to do with living love. Story is endless.

In so pure a fantasy as "Kamar-al-zaman," the writer is quite unconcerned with telling the reader what actually happened, or with teaching him how things really are, or with showing him how things appear. Yet the story generates a vigor which would have

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been impossible if it did not have to do with the truth, with a human truth of some substance. This is not to belittle the story's craftsmanship. One's interest is engaged at the outset and maintained without a lag and one's expectations are fulfilled at the end. Moreover, the rules of that imaginary world are consistent and those that govern the character's motives are purer versions of those that govern ours. In fiction when the probable and the improbable conflict, the probable always wins; the author of "Kamar-al-zaman" succeeds perfectly, at such a moment, in keeping our attention on something else so that we never ask that illusion-destroying question, "How can I be expected to believe this?" All the same, were this story not founded on some substratum of solid truth, it would be as flimsy as most science fiction, than which surely not even the romances Cervantes set out to satirize were flimsier.

A symptom of a story's excellence is that, as one reads along, one's mind enjoys a play of speculation about the story's meanings. In judging a book's value, one may consider the absence of such play far more damning than formal defects. Usually this speculation leads to serious matters taken seriously, but a story may take them lightly, as "Kamar-al-zaman" does—not frivolously so much as rejoicingly. *How delightful the truth is.* As one reads the story along, one's mind dives beneath the surface of impossible events and is charmed to watch all manner of family sexual relationships form and dissolve. Since the writer has assumed that we too know that things are thus and so, he is freed from the burden of interpreting. Thinking about what this story deals with is an activity inseparable from enjoying it. It is not true that to enjoy it one needs to understand every part, but one does need to feel that it possesses a coherent significance there to be understood, that it was composed with authority. I would no doubt enjoy "Kamar-al-zaman" a bit more if I could settle on the significance of the bird's stealing Budur's jewel and Kamar-al-zaman's pursuing it till he is lost. Yet I feel no compulsion to understand it as I do to understand Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis into a large insect. In the realm of pure fantasy, I want to understand, not because I feel a compulsion or a moral obligation to do so, but because the writer has made it seem pleasing. Reading a good fantasy is like skin-diving just for the fun of seeing what is down there in the waterworld and coming on a coffer full of gold.

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Such fiction, though it is frequently looked at with condescension, is in no danger of disappearing. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* is four volumes of charming fantasy in the British manner. I consider Faulkner's best story shorter than a novel to be "Red Leaves," a fantasy on the outrageousness of human affairs; perhaps it is because the story is so purely a fantasy that it does not get much talked about. Amos Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts,* though it may sometimes sound allegorical, is always an extravagant fantasy.

Dreaming is one of the things we really do, and what actually happens sometimes takes fantastic forms (*The Conquest of Mexico*). Steadfastness to a dream of truth generates truth, and "real life" is commonly a blundering about in what merely seems to be. Does our belief in a god create him? Do we exist in the mind of God?

For lovely speculation of such a kind, read Unamuno's legend-like "St. Manuel Bueno, Martyr." After that read his master, Cervantes, who is everyone's master at the grave play of so imaging what might be that it becomes what is.

2. *Stories of What Happened: Autobiography*

> (Prince Genji speculates:) The storyteller's own experience of men and things, whether for good or ill—not only what he has passed through himself, but even events which he has only witnessed or been told of—has moved him to an emotion so passionate that he can no longer keep it shut up in his heart. Again and again something in his own life or in that around him will seem to the writer so important that he cannot bear to let it pass into oblivion. There must never come a time, he feels, when men do not know about it.
>
> —*The Tale of Genji*

About the impulse itself there is only this to add: it is not just writers who are so moved. To every writer many laymen come bearing a strange true story for him to bless for them by telling. The sadness is that they so seldom know how to make their impulse his; which is no doubt why they assure him he will make much money from their story or why they even, if they are rich, would pay him to tell it for them.

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The three forms of telling what happened are biography, history, and autobiography.

Since biography became an important mode of writing at about the time humane scholarship became awed by scientific method, it has moved away from story-telling such as Plutarch's. However, biography (and history) lacks one of science's fundamental tools, the verification of hypothesis by experiment, and the variables and imponderables it deals with are beyond control, are indeed beyond identifying. Baffled, would-be scientific biography has put enormous emphasis on sheer fact. Since most of what most biographers know about what actually happened comes directly or indirectly through biased witnesses, is a form of hearsay, they have relied more and more on documents and letters. The result is that a great many "definitive" volumes of biography are as thorough and accurate as they claim and are also boring beyond belief. Few men have been more fascinating than Byron; yet reading Marchand's three-volume fact-for-fact's-sake definitive life is like slogging through desert sand with nothing but oases of quotation for relief. An extreme of this is to be found in Jay Leyda's *The Melville Log*, a two-volume accumulation of documents pertaining to Melville's life. "Here reader, are the materials with which you may compose your own biography of Melville." There is a kind of fascination to reading it, and also a kind of honesty in Leyda's abandonment of selectivity, of shaping, of art. Still. . . . Of course accuracy and thoroughness are indispensable to excellent biography; the greatest of biographers, Boswell, in his *Life of Johnson* was as scrupulous as that contemporary scholar Richard Ellmann in his *James Joyce*. But the most important principle these two superb narratives demonstrate is that, quite as much as an interesting subject and thoroughgoing accuracy, a biographer needs talent in his special art. (So does an autobiographer. Neither Pound's lyric nor Conrad's fictional genius assisted either to write an autobiography comparable to Emma Goldman's or Calvin Coolidge's.)

What is called an historical novel is nearly always a somewhat realistic romance set long enough ago to oblige the romancer to read up on events and customs so that he may embed his story in actual or actual-seeming details. The subject matter of history proper is large social forces, their creation, movement, corruption, interplay, ossification, destruction; individuals are portrayed (say

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by Tacitus) as they cause, lead, or exemplify these forces. But the subject matter of fiction is the relationships among and within individuals as such, whatever their connection or lack of connection with society. These are mutually incompatible modes of representing character, history conceiving that personal qualities or relationships are important as they affect society at large and fiction assuming that social forces are important as they affect the lives of its characters. How incompatible these two modes are may be demonstrated by the results of Tolstoy's trying to marry them in *War and Peace*. The greatness of the book surely has nothing to do with his portraits of actual persons, especially Napoleon and Kutuzov, or with his quarreling with the French historians and presenting his own theory of history. Indeed, while reading the novel one cares far less that the burning of Moscow actually took place than that Tolstoy vividly imagined it, less that it was part of history than that the writer made it part of his imaginary characters' lives.

Nevertheless, a kind of stubborn value attaches to an actual event which an imaginary event lacks. In many ways writers rely upon this to help them hold their readers. The Icelandic sagas began as stories of actual events, and even when the events became imaginary in part or whole the saga writers continued to tie their characters to actual clans by the usual epic device of genealogies. Kleist subtitles *Michael Kohlhaas* "From an Old Chronicle." Lady Murasaki pretends to appear from time to time in her own person as an eye-witness: "Indeed the whole Court was in such a state of chatter and excitement that my head was in a whirl, and I forgot to make any note of the many beautiful and interesting ceremonies that took place in the Palace at the time of this little Prince's birth." The reader naïvely likes the writer to say *I was there* or at least *This really happened*. Assured that it really did happen, a reader will put up with a score of defects he does not tolerate from story-tellers who make no such claim. Only knowledge that there was in fact the man Freud would support any reader through the three volumes of Jones's storyless, cottonwool biography of him.

The obvious value that attaches to narrating actual events is truth, reality. But, literarily, true-story is only one of many ways to achieve this value; the value is essential, the way is not. To me,

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Don Quixote is as real as any actual person I have ever read about, even Dr. Johnson, and he is in all ways except corporeally more real than the driver of any bus I have ever ridden on. The truth of a story is its conformance to reality, and reality does not often manifest itself powerfully in actual events or lives, but surely sometimes it does: Buddha, the death of Socrates, Stalin's career. It is the task of the biographer of a person real or fictional to choose and arrange a sequence of apparent events so as to manifest to the reader their hidden reality. Essentially the biographer, the autobiographer, and the writer of a fiction in the form of a biography or autobiography are engaged in the same literary task: *Behold the man.* There is an absolutely unbroken series of life-stories from the factual (Pepys' *Diary,* Ellmann's *Joyce*) through mixtures of fact and fantasy (*Davy Crockett's Own Story, The Notebook of Malte Laurids Brigge, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Heart of Darkness*) to the quite imaginary (*Clarissa, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*).

There is another fairly important, also non-essential difference between the life-story of an actual and an imaginary character: what actually happened sets a limit. It is one of the difficulties of the art of fiction—and hence of fiction theory and criticism—that its limits are indeterminable. It can include anything men do or imagine; it is especially attracted by strange and obscure motives; it blends with all the other forms of discourse, poetry, drama, essay, conversation, self-communing. For this reason alone, there is a considerable security for both reader and writer in knowing that one important limit is set. This is the limit not of the probable or even of the possible but of the actual. A writer who is deficient in invention, and who is at the same time able to subordinate himself to another, is especially at ease in biography. Like a translator, who turns from one language into another what a creator has given him, the biographer turns into another arrangement of words what hearsay and documents (and sometimes direct experience) have given him. But he is as much like a creative fiction writer, for most of the truth of the events will come not from the irreducible brute facts but from his conception of the man whom these facts reveal, from his so ordering the facts as to reveal that man.

The Icelandic sagas began in the twelfth century as histories of the original settlers of Iceland, and the readers cared enough about

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this for the external forms to be preserved even in some of the later sagas that incorporated wild elements of European romances. But no one now reading for enjoyment and judging on literary grounds cares in any way whether Hrafnkel once existed or whether that profound consideration of law and anarchy, *Njal's Saga,* was based on an actual feud. Literarily, the one relevant statement to be made about the historicity of the good sagas is that their genealogies are a nuisance.

An extraordinary example of the irrelevance of factuality to a fiction's power is provided by *Last Letters from Stalingrad.* In the winter of 1942-43 the Russian encirclement of the German forces at Stalingrad doomed the German army to certain defeat, yet Hitler forbade surrender. When the last planes were about to leave for Germany, each soldier and officer was permitted to send one last letter. These letters were not delivered; the seven mail bags were withheld by the Nazis for propaganda analysis, for a study of the morale of soldiers under a supreme test. The Nazi propaganda officials (who had blacked out all proper names) hoped for evidence of courageous self-sacrifice, but the tenor of the letters was so anti-Nazi that they were all destroyed. However, a war-correspondent, Heinz Schröter, under instructions from Goebbels, had been delegated to write an account of Stalingrad, and had made copies of certain of the letters and had hidden them. They were first published in Germany in 1954.[1] In a word, out of the raw, naïve material of life—private letters—an outsider fashioned a sort of story by selection and arrangement. To be sure, they do not compose a complete or ordinary story, for the soldiers are not directly related to one another in it but to a series of separate outsiders. But they accomplish very powerfully one of the ends of a story: by a series of revealed relationships they create a little world which is an intensification of a great one. Without the letters, the journalist would not have had the materials to compose this microcosm; without the journalist's shaping, the letters would have remained in the flux of life whence they came.

What I have just narrated is what is publicly known about the origin and arrangement of the letters; it is taken from the introduction to the German edition of *Last Letters* and from Schröter's

1 Published by THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. XIV, No. 3, Autumn 1961, in a translation by Franz Schneider and Charles Gullans. This translation has since been published in book form by William Morrow.

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book *Stalingrad.* But suppose one were to learn that *Last Letters* was totally an invention, either of Schröter or of someone unnamed. At this point it becomes clear that to a reader it makes no real difference one way or the other, for the letters, whoever wrote them, evoke the circumstance of the presumed writers potently and complexly in his imagination. The author—if there was a single author—put on actuality as a mask. To get us to imagine his story without reservation, he evokes our strong, natural regard for fact. But literarily he did not need to do this; for as a piece of writing a well-executed imaginary document is precisely as authentic as an actual one.

*

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
—Yeats

Autobiography, whether real or imaginary, whether diary, letters, confession, or informal essay, has an advantage over biography in that the style itself helps create the character, reveals, betrays, masks, expresses him. The very magniloquence with which Augustine inveighs against literary artifice (like the paradox of his prayer "O Lord, make me chaste, but not yet") creates one of the tensions which help make his *Confessions* not only the first true autobiography but also a great one. One of the ways we appreciate the "opening" of the narrator's character in Bernanos' *Diary of a Country Priest* is by the "opening" of the style as the novel develops. Another advantage Stendhal phrased early in his autobiographical *The Life of Henri Brulard,* in his discussion of the relative merits of writing it in the first or third person; he chose the first person because in it he could better "record the inner movements of the soul." But against its advantages, autobiography has a serious disadvantage. It presents in acute form the general problem of a writer's keeping his distance from the character he is creating. Perhaps this problem is most severe when the character he is imagining is himself past or present. Even a cursory reading in directly autobiographical writings shows how few such writers are able to conceive of themselves except in a literary stereotype. To read Sheila Graham's ghosted confessions is to learn less about her actual life or her connection with her lover F. Scott Fitzgerald than about *True Confessions* magazine clichés. It is

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harder than one would think verbally to undress, even in private, harder yet to do it in public, hardest of all to do it in public without obscenity. Most good fiction is in the third person, is not autobiographical in form whatever it may be in fact.

The same problem, distance, presents itself to a writer of fictional autobiography whose central character is based not at all or only partly on himself: the frequent use of the first person singular tends to blur in a writer's mind the distinction between himself and his character. This is of course not always true. The epistolary story circumvents the problem by the letter writer's dramatic immediacy to the situation. The short story is less dangerous than the novel for a writer of fiction in autobiographical form, for in it the sustaining of the imagined personality does not last so long and frequently the writer's intention is less to create character than to evoke the mood of an experience. Then too, there are narratives in which the use of "I" is strategic; they are not properly autobiographies at all, not even in form. Because *Moby Dick* is narrated by Ishmael, one knows while reading that at least one person will have survived the debacle, a security one badly needs; the "I" of *The Possessed* is very little more than a way of heightening the illusion of actuality, like the "we" that appears from time to time in *Madame Bovary* or the "I" of *Robinson Crusoe*; except in *Heart of Darkness,* Conrad's Marlow functions mainly as a voice, as a way of talking. However, of a good many first person novels, notoriously *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations,* in which Dickens keeps David and Pip at a distance for a few chapters and then blurs in with them, one says that their excellence is in spite of the personal point of view.

For a reader, this problem of the writer's holding his distance from his character is the same whether the autobiography is fictional (*Lolita*), literal (St. Augustine's *Confessions*), or somewhere in between (*Remembrance of Things Past*). The reader does not want to feel that the author at the time of writing the story is confusing his actual, immediate, pen-holding self with the self, real or fictional, that he is imagining—Nabokov with Humbert Humbert, Augustine the middle-aged bishop of Hippo with Augustine the provincial young blade in Rome, Proust with Marcel. He wants the writer to look at the imagined self with the cold eye of detachment and honesty. Otherwise, the self-knowledge which

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could have included us too ("nothing human is alien to me") will become the excluding mirror of self-consciousness or the obscuring murk of self-justification. The imagined character (like Boswell the doer) may be vain, self-indulgent, self-pitying, attitudinizing, self-justifying, self-lacerating; but the imagining author (like Boswell the writer) must see all this coldly for what it is and record what he sees with no special pleading. A striking example of a potentially strong confession ruined by lack of author-distance is Whittaker Chambers' *Witness*. Here are a public situation, a character, and a dark inner tangle worthy of a Dostoievsky novel, all spoiled by a vain confusion of self-justification on the part not only of the imagined character but also of the imagining writer.

An author may put his consciousness of these considerations to good use. Gide, whose journals formidably intensify the coldness of distance with cold self-analysis, posthumously made it clear that *Strait Is the Gate* had been based immediately upon his own relationship with his wife. Yet despite the novel's being cast in autobiographical form with a journal at its very core, the reader is not disturbed by knowing how intimately Gide was using his own experience; for at no point does the reader suffer either the embarrassment caused by an author's unintentional self-revelation or the fatal disillusionment that comes when he says to himself, "Aha, that is included not because the story demanded it but because it occurred in actual life." Gide worked for years polishing the novel, removing from it every taint of special self-pleading. If this marvelously elegant story has an imperfection, it is the rather insubstantial quality of Jerome's character caused, no doubt, by Gide's fastidious concern to keep his immediate self clear of Jerome, as a consequence of which Jerome exists only in relation to Alissa. This may be formally justified but it does vitiate the character. It is not only Gide's eye that is cold.

At its best, the real author's consciousness of the necessity for him to keep his distance can become a delightful form-consciousness on the part of the supposed writer. The great bravura pieces of this sort are *Tristram Shandy* and *Confessions of Felix Krull,* in both of which novels a good share of the grace and quality come from the author's incomparable play with form-consciousness. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how such consciousness could be used more complexly than in *Felix Krull.* Felix is an artist whose mate-

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rial is his natural endowments and whose works of art are the selves which the world sees. Hs is the artist of himself. And at no point does he or the reader confuse who he pretended to be with who he is as writer, and at no point does Mann confuse himself with any of the Felixes. I think it not irrelevant that both Tristram and Felix take pleasure in the world, are fond of most of those about them, and are cordial with themselves.

A cold eye and a warm heart.

Of the three modes of telling what actually happened, autobiography has provided, for obvious reasons, much the largest tributary to the main stream of fiction. Not only has it contributed the most quantitatively; it has also exemplified in the most concentrated form how important honesty can be in story-telling.

The prime honesty, shared by all three, is fidelity to what happened—not a large matter but one which only the naïve think easy. Every lawyer assumes that most people cannot report accurately the details of what they have observed, much less of what they have caused. Indeed, fidelity to fact is important enough so that, whenever the issue comes up (as it does in history especially), it becomes crucial. Herodotus the wonder-seeker was by far the better story-teller, but Thucydides, who was there or talked to those who were there, was the greater historian and finally the greater writer.

There is an additional quality special to autobiography: the steadiness and sense of proportion it takes to know oneself. The difficulty of assigning and measuring responsibility for an act, the disentanglement of character traits for clear presentation, the infinite complexity of motive—in no form of writing are these more important than in autobiography. Just as in no human endeavor is honesty more important than in self-scrutiny, so in no literary one is sincerity so essential as in autobiography.

Unfortunately, literary accomplishment is not dependent only upon a writer's sincerity. Finding the words by which to project his discoveries may be a gift quite denied him, so that he employs commonplaces, clichés, stereotypes that in a more sophisticated writer would betoken insincerity. Conversely, a good novelist can feign sincerity like a good actor (the Greek word for actor was hypocrite). One feels when reading *Dangerous Acquaintances* that

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the letters Choderlos de Laclos wrote for the imagined Mme. de Merteuil could not have been improved upon by the actual Mme. de Montmart upon whom Merteuil was modeled. To the reader, to the critic, the impression of honesty is more important than the writer's actual and literal sincerity. Perhaps the most one should say is that, granted a certain competence with language, one way for a writer to achieve the impression of fidelity to fact is to be faithful to fact, that one way for a writer to impress the reader as sincere is for himself the man to be sincere, to wear the mask of himself. All the same, surely from the profoundest altitudes of self-honesty each must call in his own voice. One cannot help believing that only St. Teresa could have written her *Autobiography,* only Van Gogh his letters to his brother, and that no fiction in autobiographical form could have said what they said in a voice so absolutely true as theirs.

3. *Story, and Speculation on the Nature of Things*

> In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God.

So John began the most important story he could tell. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, wishing to create primarily the image of a man, took the biographer's stance; genealogy, anecdote, scene, direct quotation are their chief instruments. But the Jesus of John's story is less visible than the penumbra Christ. It is not the man himself that John wants us to concern ourselves with so much as his significance. In the fourth gospel, Christ's sayings, parables, and sermons sound as much like metaphysical John as like the Jesus of the synoptic three. In John the impulse to teach, to explain the hidden nature of things, to speculate was at least as strong as the impulse to tell his story. Like Plato with the parable of the cave, like Augustine with events from his own life, like Bunyan with his imagined dream, like Kierkegaard, like any preacher, he used his story to illustrate his ideas because he thought his ideas, the extractable meaning, were what made his story important.

The speculative impulse as it merges with story takes several guises other than illustration. The most important are (these are by no means logical categories, clearly defined and mutually exclusive): the dialogue (*Rameau's Nephew*); creation of a character by

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presenting his ideas (Montaigne's *Essays*); anatomy (Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*); and narrative satire (*Rasselas*). The great age of this sort of writing was the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Continental story-tellers overtly concerned with ideas still are regarded with esteem: Koestler, Camus, Hesse, Unamuno, Lagerkvist. But in English there are few; the most celebrated one in recent years is Durrell, who has spent very little of his life in an English-speaking country and whose ideas, in any case, are vastly inferior to his romance. Satire in suitably "novelistic" mixture is still admissible, but the other kinds of idea-fiction are so apt to be looked at askance that very few are written. Partly this is due to the inscrutable shifts in taste from age to age; partly, however, it is due to the ascendancy of realistic fiction and of Jamesianism (for which James himself must not be held fully accountable). A shibboleth of contemporary fiction criticism holds that the characters and actions must speak for themselves without comment, that the writer ought to disappear into his fiction. For such reasons this criticism rather looks down on a mode of writing which numbers among its purest practitioners Rabelais and Montaigne and among its less pure ones Plato, Cervantes, Bunyan, Swift, Fielding, Sterne, Dostoievsky, Joyce, and Mann—rather as Shakespeare used to be disparaged for having violated the three neo-Aristotelian unities. In criticism one must think of Jamesianism as of the School of Boileau (which also was not without merit): *This too will pass*—though God knows it may take a while.

How can *Rameau's Nephew* be called fiction? True, it has no proper narrative but it does have imagined characters projected by their dialogue; through their ideas and attitudes we come to know them. Then why is not Plato's *Symposium* a work of fiction? It is something of one. Both these dialogues, and the dialogue between Settembrini and Naphta in *The Magic Mountain,* exist in the ill-charted regions between philosophy and story. Whether they are called one thing or the other depends upon the stance they take, the direction they face. In *The Symposium* Plato employs the scene and the characters as a way of heightening what he intended to be the main thing, his ideas; whereas in the Settembrini-Naphta scene Mann, less than explaining the ideas for their own or the truth's sake, was showing how enlightened, civil-

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ized men employ and play with ideas and how ideas can affect a young man not yet used to them. *Rameau's Nephew* lies somewhere between these two, though rather nearer Mann than Plato.

A philosopher proper is one who succeeds in disentangling ideas about the world from the world and in making a fairly coherent system of his ideas. Such disentangling and ordering is greater in *The Symposium* than in *Rameau's Nephew*; in the *Republic* it is greater still, and by *The Laws* the sense of dialogue has all but vanished, the sense of an intercourse of opinion among imagined characters. Such men as Voltaire, Dr. Johnson, Diderot, Jefferson, and Sade were thinkers of a sort; ideas animated them and what they wrote was primarily concerned with ideas. Yet they were less concerned with disentangling or systematizing their ideas than with expressing them with persuasive elegance and with turning them into social or private action. Such romances as *Zadig, Candide, Justine,* and *Rasselas* are vehicles for commenting on the world. These men are not interested in autobiography or self-expression; the Word is too important to them for that, as they believe. Indeed it is an assumption of such a piece as *Rameau's Nephew* that the Word can become Man. This was Sade's assumption too, though his novels are as dull as his ideas are vile. (It has turned out, alas, that he was as right as were the optimistic philosophes whose inversion he was. Man in a state of nature is good, is bad: how extraordinary that for several generations Europe accepted either of these notions, or the root notion that man is ever in a state of nature, or should be in it.)

Consider Ivan's fable "The Grand Inquisitor". *The Brothers Karamazov* creates Ivan in the reader's mind primarily through a series of intellectual dialogues. Mostly the ideas of these dialogues are presented passionately and dramatically; the Word is made flesh. Ivan's conversations with the devil illustrate his state of mind and illuminate his behavior on the witness stand, and the main event of the book, the murder, is Smerdyakov's incarnating Ivan's Word in action. So, his telling "The Grand Inquisitor" to Alyosha illustrates his agony of doubt and his intellectual's refusal to leave the mysteries alone. Just as the heart of the fable is the Inquisitor's defense of himself to the Christ, so Ivan defends (and exposes) himself to Alyosha by telling him the fable. Just as the

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Christ does not argue with the Inquisitor but gives him a kiss, so Alyosha, understanding that episode of Ivan's story as Ivan's plea for redeeming love, kisses him.

Now all of this is sufficiently "novelistic," but it takes no account of the story of the Grand Inquisitor as such nor of the ideas which the story deals with. Yet these far more than its integration into the novel give it its celebrity as the most brilliant autonomous passage in Dostoievsky and the supreme fable about modern rationalist, progressivist, irreligious man—about the "socialist." Novelistically, structurally, the fable did not need to be as powerful, as intrinsically good, as it is. The narrator's ideas in the first half of *Notes from Underground* are perhaps comparable to Ivan's in intrinsic interest, but their proliferation, their turbulence, their lack of an internal coherence such as the fable of the Grand Inquisitor affords, keeps them from flourishing apart from the Underground man himself. Raskolnikov's superman theories are not so clear and forceful as Nietzsche's, and they are wholly integrated into his character and actions. But "The Grand Inquisitor" leads a life of its own. It does not positively contradict or damage anything else in the novel; its defect is its very excellence—according to that literary esthetic which holds that the structural coherence of ideas, not their power or truth, is all that matters as they occur in a story, poem, or play. No one, beginning with Dostoievsky himself, would deny that Dostoievsky's stories are marred by excesses and disproportions, nor should one deny that perfection of form is a noble ideal in art. But perfection is only one of several high goods, and when perfectionism is allowed to tyrannize, it can yield the judgment that for the good of *The Brothers Karamazov* "The Grand Inquisitor" should have been less beautiful, less powerful, less wise. To one for whom both the play and the truth of ideas are of high importance wherever they are found, even in a story, the judgment is monstrous. Not the least of the reasons for the greatness of this imperfect book is the extravagance of its intellectual energy, the exuberance of its wisdom.

An anatomy is an odd sort of writing, about as shapely as a gunnysack bulging with stores. Of all the kinds of literature it is the most bookish: it is full of allusions to other books; its lovers are bookish people (Dr. Johnson said that "Burton's *Anatomy of*

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Melancholy was the only book that ever took him out of bed two hours sooner than he wished to rise"); the anatomist is a scholar in the old sense, a man of learning most of whose experience comes from books. The impulse to anatomy still occurs, as evidenced by such books as those of Montagu Summers on the black arts; but in effect anatomy is extinct, for a mind strong enough to write a good anatomy has not for some time been allowed the necessary bagginess but is turned into what is now meant by a scholar. George Saintsbury, for example, might very well have been happier shuffling together an Anatomy of Books than machine-making all those histories and surveys he actually produced; and despite the title, Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* is intellectually rigorous in its schema. The great intellectual good which science, would-be science, and awe of science have imposed upon scholars is not wisdom and certainly not play, but logical discipline. Literary scholars have been inspired with distrust of literature except as subject matter, as amusement, or as an impersonal, remote power to be revered; and scholars of all varieties (this has become especially virulent in America) have abandoned humane discourse, as being imprecise, in favor of a sort of sign language. Compare Havelock Ellis and Dr. Kinsey on sex. Though Ellis has scientific pretensions, the best thing about *The Psychology of Sex* is its ragbag accumulation of lore, and the language in which it is written, if not very high in the literary scale, is at least readable. In Kinsey there is not a trace of the anatomist left: he exactly defines his field, within it he is statistically thorough, and he uses a sign language having nothing to do with literary discourse—it is a version of the dumb hailing the deaf.

Though wildman bookishness may have become shy about displaying itself in full anatomy since the seventeenth century, still its disjecta membra are to be found strewn among stories, especially in such novels as *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses,* the main energy of which lies in their language rather than in the narrative or characters. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* is the autobiography of an anatomist. Tristram is created in good part by his quirks of erudition and opinion, and the other characters are apprehended less as realistic personalities than as static, undeveloping "characters" dominated by one eccentricity, by a hobby-horse. Moreover, there is the rush of language, the

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parody, the fondness for odd or foreign words, the concern for (and superb control of) style, the love of digression, the display of erudition. Dickens has some of this, though not in so concentrated a form; so do the Melville of *Moby Dick* and the Twain of *Huckleberry Finn*. The Joyce of *Ulysses* has it all, in different proportions, and especially a gusto for wild wonderful lists, for vulgar errors, and for puzzles. Contemporaneously, Saul Bellow is a rush-of-words writer of wildman fiction, for example in such a true "character" as quirky Tamkin in *Seize the Day;* the Nabokov of *Lolita* is more than half anatomist; the merits of Henry Miller's grotesque stories are those of anatomy; it is a pity that Aldous Huxley wrote any sort of fiction besides satiric anatomies. The indispensable tone for such fiction, the essential attitude towards its characters and events even when they are grimly painful, is comic. Sentiment, indignation, bewilderment, outrage—the comic tone overrides all, an awareness of absurdity. It is to be found, though nowhere else, in the sense of abundant delight with which the language talks about its subject or veers off towards anything else under the sun. It is in the voice of one who can not forget for long: *How impenetrably absurd the world is.*

Of the several ways in which speculating on the nature of things combines with story-telling, satire is by far the most frequent. Whether it is an Horatian impulse to laugh somewhat affectionately at, or a Juvenalian drive mercilessly to scourge, mankind for its foolishness, dishonesty, stupidity, filthy vice, corrupt institutions, vanity, avarice, the satirist's clear intention is to say that things should be better arranged than this. However disguisedly, he may also intend his satire to prod and sting his readers into arranging things better. But whether the reader goes into action, whether the writer wants him to, these are inessential, for satire is not propaganda. What is essential is a vision, for the writer to make the reader see men as being viler or sillier than they ought to be.

As a literary category, narrative satire is thoroughly unsatisfactory. Frye describes something called Menippean satire, a striking creature something like a gryphon: the ancient rhetoricians report having seen one, but unfortunately somewhere in

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the dark ages it lost its way and has existed for centuries only in rumor. I suspect that the satiric impulse is not at all a narrative one but takes as its pure form that sort of essay in either verse or prose which used to be called a satire. ("A satire" is nearly extinct now; neither Orwell nor his critics commonly refer to his essays as "satires.") Usually, however, it merges with other literary impulses; formally, it becomes adjectival. *Tartuffe* is a satiric comedy; *Gargantua and Pantagruel* is a satiric anatomy (the two are very congenial); if *Animal Farm* survives, it will be as what it also was from the start, a tale for children, the visible half of a satiric allegory. The term narrative satire does not indicate a form but the blurred judgment that, whereas in *that* case, *Middlemarch* for example, the satire is no more than a quality of tone, in *this* case, *A Tale of A Tub* for example, the story exists for the convenience of the satire. There is another way of putting it. When a storyteller opens his revulsion full flood, as West did in *Miss Lonelyhearts* and as Swift did most savagely in Gulliver's fourth voyage, then the story itself becomes a figure of the satire. It should be judged only partly by the canon of realism in the one case or of romance in the other. Everything in *Miss Lonelyhearts* could have happened; yet West did not select and arrange the events as a way of saying "Life is like that." He did it to say "This is dreadful, life ought not to be like this." It seems to be a realistic story, but as much as this it is a satire, a sermon given over to the illustration of an unstated text.

4. Making a Likeness: Realistic Fiction

Chekhov said: "You live badly, my friends. It is a shame to live like that." But his best stories, such as "The Duel," are not satires. They do not express horror, censure, ridicule at the way people behave; they show the way people behave. Nor does he do this to illustrate a point, overtly to teach; he does it as one tells a tale or tells what happened, for its own sake.

*

> I do not attribute to myself any guarantee of merit except that of painting a *real likeness* of nature.
> —Stendhal

Moderns are so used to having visual likenesses about them

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that they are apt not to realize how sophisticated it is to make one. To enjoy one is easy enough, but to make one is another matter. For a very long time beasts and men in painting and sculpture obviously came from ideas—from dreams or ideals—rather than from observation of the appearance of actual individuals. In literary terms realism signifies making a likeness with words, and it is worth while recalling just how recent a province realism is. According to standard European literary history of the main-currents sort, realistic fiction is a creation of the eighteenth century (sagas do not count, not being in The Great Tradition). The inhabitant of realism is not infrequently guilty of that provincial's arrogance which measures things by his own limited standards. F. Scott Fitzgerald said that if a writer began with an individual he would end with a type and if he began with a type, he would end with nothing. To repeat the mot without prefacing it with the phrase, "in realistic writing," is to be guilty of a sleaziness. Fielding would have spat on the notion ("I describe not men, but manners; not an individual but a species"), and, if I may be invidious, Fitzgerald's collected writings are mighty wan and flabby beside *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones*. I do not mean that realistic fiction as such is an inferior form of literature. Any province which can lay claim in whole or in part to most of European fiction for the past two centuries is one of the glories of literature—of its many glories one.

The technique of striking off a visual likeness is not difficult to acquire. It needs no talent to take a snapshot or make a death-mask. But making a likeness which is also art, that is another matter. In ancient Greece portraiture was little practised, not because it was beyond the artists but because it was considered low; beauty was art's true business and beauty was considered seldom or never to manifest itself in actuality, in appearances. During the centuries when portraiture was held to be high art, it was as much the painter's style as the subject's appearance that got onto canvas; imagine the same person painted by Tintoretto, Holbein, Rembrandt, Gainsborough, and Goya. When somebody complained to Picasso that his portrait of Gertrude Stein did not look like her, Picasso is reported to have said, "It will." Like any good painter, he was less interested in imitating Stein's appearance than in rearranging it so as to embody his idea of her; because he was

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a good painter, his idea seemed strange at first but later it seemed more true than the mere appearance. It is only comparatively that a good portrait can be called real, true, life-like.

In literature as in painting, realism is the art of manifesting an idea by means of arranging the appearances of actual things into a recognizable likeness. When it is done well, one is likely not to penetrate to the idea but to rest content with a clap of recognition, with saying, "Life is really like that." The danger is in the "really."

Auden has written that one of the qualities he values highly in a young poet is the power to notice; indeed, in an age which puts such barriers of distraction and idea between seer and thing seen, to notice and to describe accurately is a moral virtue. He did not mean by this the irrelevant scrupulosity which drove Joyce to an excess of accuracy about the appearances of actual places in Dublin. He meant a fidelity to the actual for its own sake such as assisted Lawrence to describe so well a rearing horse, Hardy a girl hoeing turnips, Twain a raft on a river in a fog. But, as such, regard for sensory experience is not very important in fiction. If so small a fidelity warrants being termed moral, how very important is fidelity to those gestures, inflections, glances, actions, speeches, which reveal fiction's main matter: the secret lives of individuals, the intricacies of their relationship to one another and to society, the movements of the soul. What realistic fiction imitates is not physical appearance as such. It is the developing relationships among characters, as revealed by their externally apprehensible behavior and their conscious thoughts—among characters, that is, whose physical, social, and psychological behavior conforms to what is there to be observed in life.

Realism assumes man under the aspect of nature. That the hardiest strain of realistic fiction should have arisen along with natural science is more than coincidence; they were both flora of the same new climate of opinion. In the latter part of the nineteenth century when scientific determinism was at its most presumptuous, naturalistic fiction shot off towards it away from the main stream of literature; nothing but a general acceptance of science's worst philosophical pretensions can explain the prestige of this dullest perversion of story-telling yet applauded, the ex-

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treme of which is that anti-story, the case history. Writers of good realistic fiction (Eliot, Crane), like supple and humane scientists, assume that men exist in a natural order but that not everything about them can be known, predicted. Unlike almost all other kinds of writing, naturalism and realism restrict their vision to what can be seen by natural light. Naturalism asserts that there is no other way of seeing than by that part of the spectrum visible to human eyes. Realism too will know only what can be seen, but it assumes that both upward and downward in the range of "black" there are things, still in the natural order, which to imagine would stir the soggiest heart, especially things in our own souls of which we are not properly aware.

A realistic writer, like a scientist, may believe there is also a supernatural order but he will admit it into his fiction only as it affects his characters' naturally describable behavior. Prince André dying on the battlefield in *War and Peace* experiences something that profoundly affects and changes him. What the reader knows is that he has a head wound, becomes indifferent to what had formerly been of greatest importance to him, and looks deeply into the sky. The experience as rendered is psychologically credible in the natural order, and it can be, but does not have to be, apprehended as somehow connected with the supernatural, the religious. That a character in a realistic story should believe an event to be providential, as Alyosha Karamazov does, is perfectly acceptable since there are such people in the natural world; but to hinge a realistic story on divine intervention, as Greene does in *The End of the Affair,* is to ruin it. There can be no miracles in *Middlemarch,* yet there must be mystery. Time, space, physical and biological laws, the mazes of psychology, social customs, these must all be as they are in life; yet there must be mystery. An ambiguous art, realistic fiction. One of its minor masterpieces is "The Turn of the Screw," in which James goes right to the brink of "black" and peers as far into mystery as realism's ambiguities will penetrate: the apparitions are ghosts *according to the narrator,* the strangeness (but not unnaturalness) of whose mind the very story demonstrates. Whenever it is a question of the supernatural (as it is not for Narayan, who in *Grateful for Life and Death* assumes ghosts as part of the natural order), it must not be the ghosts or miracles which the likeness is of but the mind of the

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character who experiences what he believes to be ghosts or miracles. It is his state of mind which is "real."

If part of the overvaluation of realistic fiction comes from its verisimilitude, as much or more comes from the term "realistic" itself. Literarily "realism" should refer only to the imitation of the actual, but in fact it is so closely associated with "reality" that it elevates whatever it touches (as "nonrealistic fiction" has come to be not simply a neutral term but slightly pejorative). But the largest part of the overrating comes from a philosophical agreement with the assumptions of realism. Good but quite small writers such as C. P. Snow and Katherine Anne Porter are often treated with the seriousness accorded those who belong to an Himalaya of literature; they may in themselves not be as grand as various individual mountains, yet they are treated as though they belonged to the range nearest reality. Many believe, or assume in a muddled sort of way, that reality is all—and only—that which can be apprehended by the senses and deduced by reason; for them, realism will be the most congenial kind of art, the truest. Many believe, more generally, that reality is an entity separate from the idea-making, fantasying mind; they are at least disposed in favor of realism. But for those who believe that reality is seldom manifest and is not only something to be imitated but is also something created, realism like any other kind of art is valuable as it transcends mere impact and becomes experience—that is, as it creates a reality of its own which is a figure of the hidden reality already there before the artist began. *War and Peace* made such a figure mainly in the realistic mode, *Don Quixote* mainly in the mode of romance. But how could one presume to choose between these two magnificences?

All this about realistic fiction obviously has much in common with autobiography, and the overlap between the two is continuous and enormous. A writer may conceive of himself as a character, like the reporter in Crane's "The Open Boat," and the characters may present themselves autobiographically, as in any epistolary story. Further, for place, characters, situations, costumes, ways of speaking, every realistic fiction writer draws upon his experience in life far more than upon his imagination (Joyce worried whether he was deficient in invention). The difference may be seen when the examples are fairly pure. I know almost nothing

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of the man Augustine except what I have learned from his *Confessions;* from them I intimately know a great deal about the motions of his soul, about a man moving towards the Infinite, indeed about the soul itself; but from them I learn fictionally very little else, a little about the society of the time, something about his mother and less about four or five other people, almost nothing about the woman with whom he lived for several years and by whom he had a son (about whom I know only his name). I know nothing whatever about the person who wrote *Njal's Saga,* either externally or from reading the novel, and I suppose it was written by a man only because a learned friend instructs me that thirteenth century Icelandic women did not, so far as is known, do such things as write sagas; but I learn from it a great deal about more than a score of persons (who may or may not have existed in fact) and about a particular society, indeed about men's connection with Society, their hatred of the Law they need.

As for the craft of realistic fiction, James wrote about it at length and Jamesianism has evolved most subtle elaborations upon his texts. When reading this body of criticism, one must remember that Cervantes, Tolstoy, and Dostoievsky among them violate most of the principles it holds dear and that one should preface the words "fiction" and "novel" (as in Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* or James's *The Art of the Novel*) with the word "realistic." Taking these precautions, one can learn much from Jamesianism.

The most important technical issue this criticism raises, one which has latterly become a special bugaboo for fiction writers, is point of view. Of course it is important for the writer to have a firm control of point of view, especially to maintain the proper distance from his subject. Effectively this means that, though the writer may loathe his character as Dickens loathed Uriah Heep, yet that character must be left free to act and speak according to his own nature and not according to his creator's opinion of him. This is, as it were, the literary analogue to that moral admonition to grant to others their otherness. But one begins thinking of some wonderful stories that do not always pay attention to the rules: Dickens often failed to keep a proper distance in his novels, most egregiously when a child was dying; it was as though Hardy

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loved Tess so much that the pain of grinding her down and out was more than he could fully bear, so that he withdrew too far from her in the last, most tragic section of the novel; Fielding whenever he wished violated his story to speak to the reader; Lawrence had no business tacking that sermon a few years later onto the end of "The Fox." And one thinks of some tiny fiction acrobats leaping among their dandy points of view with the greatest of skill: J. D. Salinger is one of the best, as in "For Esmé, with Love and Squalor," in the midst of which story he flies from first person to third; Mary McCarthy wrote "The Genial Host" (one of the stories in *The Company She Keeps*) in the second person, which demanded agility; Alain Robbe-Grillet outdoes everyone by assuming in *Jealousy* . . . but no, pay your dollar and go see that stunt show for yourself. Also one remembers that James the Ambiguous was not altogether pleased with Flaubert, whose formal perfection he of course hailed; that he thought the main business of fiction was to capture a felt sense of life, especially of moral life; that he could say that Tolstoy (whose novels at another time he lumped together with Dostoievsky's as "fluid puddings") was "a reflector as vast as a natural lake; a monster harnessed to his great subject—all human life!" After such reflections one decides that probably a writer need concern himself less and less about the technicalities of point of view as he gains in power and wisdom; the more powerful the story the more point of view ceases to be a matter of craft and becomes an admonition to the story-teller to be wise. In the hands of a master a reader quite forgets about point of view, for it comes to seem that he is looking at reality truly. To do this, of course, he must stand somewhere, but the very doing, the high delight of true vision, makes him cease to notice any irregularities in what he is standing on.

There are two accidental but important issues involved in Jamesianism's over-valuation of Flaubert, the first of which properly belongs to cultural history.

It has to do with the modern cult of The Artist. Flaubert dedicated himself to being an Artist of fiction as no predecessor had done—as James and Joyce supremely did, as Tolstoy and Chekhov utterly did not. *Madame Bovary* is beyond cavil a fine piece of craftsmanship; as a likeness it has only one flaw of much conse-

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quence, the blind beggar's manipulated, almost purely symbolic appearance as Emma lies dying; the flaw is not grave. But I can think of no essential respect in which *Pride and Prejudice* is less well wrought, and if Jane Austen manipulated her plot considerably more than Flaubert did his, she did not thereby violate the essential relationships among the characters. In other words, part of the reason for *Bovary's* prestige has been the irrelevant fact that Flaubert thought of himself as The Artist and spoke with great self-consciousness of his art as, say, Austen did not. In addition, that there was an attempt to suppress the novel on publication and that it triumphed over the Enemy helped make Flaubert into an Artist-Hero; Austen has labored under the handicap of respectability even in her reputation.

The second matter that helps account for the excessive regard for *Bovary's* importance has to do with Flaubert's criticism of provincial bourgeois society. Of all forms of literature, the realistic novel is the most directly concerned with social relationships, for in considerable part it defines its characters by the way they play their roles in society. For this reason the writer cannot help criticizing the society he is writing about, which must also be quite similar to the society he knows by experience. (The frequent assertion that "the novel is a middle-class art" should read "most writers of realistic fiction write about the middle classes into which they were born.") Lady Murasaki thoroughly approves of the aristocratic customs, ideals and arrangements which make Genji possible; Austen approves, with ironic reservations, of the rather functionless rural gentry she writes about; Chekhov deplores late nineteenth century Russia; Joyce devotes much of his force to attacking Ireland, the Catholic Church, the British Empire, the life of modern cities; Céline abandons himself to his loathing of all modern society. Whether the author's social views are expressed overtly like Dickens' in *Bleak House,* whether the characters present their opinions as some of Silone's do in *Bread and Wine* or the author analyzes them rather sociologically as Eliot does in *Middlemarch,* or whether neither author nor characters appear to have any such opinions, as in Wharton's *Ethan Frome,* this much is certain: more than any other form of art realistic fiction involves itself intimately in a system of social relationships, imitates a part of a society. The author's opinions

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about that society may be interesting but they are usually inessential to the fiction. Such matters as these are always essential for they affect action: the modes of courtship, the forms and extent of an employer's power over his employees, who owns the land a farmer works, what an unmarried girl is expected to do if she becomes pregnant and how she is looked at by her neighbors. Now Flaubert's implicit thesis was one especially congenial to modern intellectuals: the life of the provincial bourgeoisie is deadly and deadening, most of all esthetically; by extension, modern society is deadening to the rare, sensitive soul, especially to The Artist. No doubt this is in good part true; it is one of the explicit themes in many first-rate fiction writers—Eliot, Chekhov. Yet it is not the whole truth; Austen, Balzac, Tanizaki (*The Makioka Sisters*) as well as the two named above are not simply wrong to find living virtue in some of the members of bourgeois society. The danger is for this thesis to be accepted as dogma. When a reader so accepts it, he overrates a Flaubert or Joyce for confirming his prejudices, though the critic or reader may not acknowledge or even recognize this as the main reason for his overvaluation. No one satisfies these prejudices more thoroughly than James, who not only scorns bourgeois vulgarity but also makes the reader feel that anyone who has good taste is aristocratic, including any reader who has the good taste to like James.

The effect of this dogma can be most damaging to the novelist. *Madame Bovary* is an amazing work of likeness, from the parlor interiors to the course of Emma's love affairs. By reason of that very fact, it is not a satire, even though, like *Middlemarch,* it has a perceptible satiric tinge. Had it been clearly committed to satire as *Miss Lonelyhearts* is, then its partial truth would have been a distortion for the purpose of emphasis. But a realistic writer assumes the impersonal stance of one who is getting at as much of the whole truth as the likeness he is making can figure forth; his small image is meant to be in proportion to the larger reality of which it is a likeness. Flaubert maintains the stance of impersonality admirably. He treats every character with the same cold detachment. It is a coldness, however, not of the eye only but also of the heart. Except for the doctor called in to remedy Charles's bungling (the only character in the novel who comes off well) and except for Emma finally, Flaubert finds nothing human

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enough in his characters to respond to or to make us respond to with warmth, with admiration—perhaps with a certain pity for Charles, but a pity corrupted by disdain for his stupidity. (Tolstoy loathed adultery, but when he was preparing to write *Anna Karenina* he said that "his problem was to represent this woman as not guilty but merely pitiful.") Flaubert's very coldness implies not only that the society is deadly but also that the persons in it are or will soon be entirely deadened—not most of them partially deadened but all of them entirely.

Chekhov, who also knew and loathed the bourgeois society of the provinces, does not spare that society in his good fiction. In very many of his lesser stories, he descends to something not much above analytic sociology. But in a story as successful as "The Duel," he does the better thing: he makes a likeness of that society and also penetrates to the inner nature of the individuals who live in it but do not just live in it. His comprehension of these people is that of the highest realistic fiction. Not everything about them demonstrates the power of social forces or comments upon these forces. They are coherent persons full of those sudden and continual contradictions without which a realistic character does not have a full life.

If there were a society as inescapably deadening as that which Flaubert asserted the society of his novel to be, then the most in realistic fiction which that society could be imagined to produce would be negligible, for in it every writer too would be deadened —as Flaubert himself was not, as Chekhov the humane, who did not hate the sin so much as he felt for the sinner, knew many were not.

A cold eye but a warm heart.

Realistic fiction deals intimately with those actions and relations which are essentially moral. Just as a realistic writer must assume a certain stance toward the society he imagines, so he cannot help assuming a stance towards the moral life of his imagined people. It will be indistinguishable from a real-life stance towards moral issues. Bellow did not assume, so far as one can judge by reading *Seize the Day,* a special story-telling stance towards Tommy Wilhelm's self-pity. Suppose the story to have been written by Tommy while seeing himself as a justified victim. (Pre-

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cisely this ruined Whittaker Chambers' autobiography, *Witness.*) Since in realistic fiction the author's moral stance towards his characters is also a stance towards actual people, a work of realistic fiction may be said to be in some way a work of life as well. And writers and critics of such fiction agree among themselves on moral matters no better than kings and philosophers.

There are a couple of lesser considerations to be disposed of. The first is whether a story may have a bad effect on some readers, the answer to which everyone agrees to be yes. But which story on which readers, and what to do? Pornography is the main issue and the muddle is hopeless. One might as well recall that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* offended Joyce as *Ulysses* offended Lawrence and that anti-pornographic laws originate in the Puritan seventeenth century; then, murmuring "To the pure all things are pure," one would do well to turn over to lawyers the dubious job of drawing straight lines in this shifting swamp. The second consideration has to do with which sorts of actions and thoughts it is immoral to present in fiction, the answer to which is clear: there is no moral reason to exclude any action or any thought from a story. That a Puritan who is willing to contemplate in a story the worst act his religion thinks possible, Judas' betrayal of Jesus, should be offended by an account of a man and woman fondling one another's genitals is perfectly reasonable but it has less to do with morality than the Puritan thinks it does. It has to do with the feeling of broken taboos which is natural when one intrudes upon others in the performance of one of those bodily acts which each must do for himself. Moreover, if it is esthetically right and humanly true for a character to have the vilest of thoughts, then the moral problem becomes the literary one of tone, of distance, of keeping the idea the character's, and it is quite indefensible to suppress the thought as such. But again, this is properly a question for civil liberties lawyers. In sum: as man, novelist, and thinker, the Marquis de Sade is condemned, but there is no moral reason why he, his acts and his thoughts could not be admitted into a good novel; the question, at once moral and esthetic, would be how he should be presented, with what sanction on the part of the novelist.

My contention is that a good work of fiction not only delights the reader but also is informed by a steady and adequate vision.

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The steadiness presents few difficulties, but "adequate vision" needs defending against both the moral relativist and the esthetician (who are not infrequently the same person).

The scientist assumes towards whatever he is studying the stance of pure inquiry: it is worth studying not because it is good or beautiful but because it is. Zola in fiction theoretically looked with the eyes of a naturalist and his novels may be seen as the wreckage of a good romancer. The esthete assumes that a thing is interesting as it is beautiful or in some way esthetically pleasing. Gide obviously assumes this in that tiresome early book *Fruits of the Earth;* but in *Strait Is the Gate* his position as novelist is manifestly moral. It may or may not be true that as a man he took this position for esthetic reasons, to savor it and by doing so to savor Alissa's spiritual agony. But just as he purified the story of any sense of the extraneously autobiographical, so he purified it of his estheticism (if in fact that was his motive). The evidence for the accusation is not to be found in the story itself, and by the nature of the case all other evidence is inadmissible. In addition to taking the would-be scientist's or the esthete's stance, a storyteller may also proceed as though the issue did not exist and assume some local set of values, those of a game, for example. But the best such stories are very light of weight—nearly all science-fiction, Poe's "The Gold Bug," Thurber's "You Can Look It Up." When, as with *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* or *Alice in Wonderland,* such a story has some greater value, it is not because of the author's moral seriousness or whatever moral qualities the characters display but because it is a fantasy. I know of no realistic story which takes a holiday from moral concern and also creates a considerable reality of its own.

A book's excellence should not be determined by its effect on the world or its writer's moralistic intentions; neither should it be judged according as it achieves or fails to achieve the judge's own set moral order. Such ways of judging led Plato in *The Republic* to condemn Homer (the story goes that *The Iliad* was under his pillow when he died). Tolstoy in *What Is Art?* rated *Uncle Tom's Cabin* higher than his own novels, but when he had been writing *War and Peace* he defined his exalted ideal thus: "The aim of an artist is not to resolve a question irrefutably, but to compel one

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to love life in all its manifestations, and these are inexhaustible."

"Moral order" implies a set of laws, whether divinely ordained or natural, that exist apart from social conventions or from our knowledge and acceptance of them. A writer of realistic fiction is not to be judged as he believes in such an order or as he expounds it in his story, any more than he should be judged according as he holds to a psychological system and as this system conforms to the psychoanalytic one. To be sure, in a cloudy sort of way writers agree on principles if they are stated generally and abstractly enough. It is good to help an unfortunate, brothers are rivals for their parents' affection, vengeance is natural but forgiveness is very good. . . . It is not these bleached bones of psychology or ethics that a story-teller cares about but a person moving in the unpredictable flesh of decision and action. Dostoievsky once said never to tell the reader what a character's deepest motive was. Exactly: let the bones be covered with meat. The realistic writer's concern is with the world of contingency, the world we daily live in, where it is hard to know what actually happened, harder yet to know and weigh the motives (moral and psychological) and consequences of an act, and quite impossible to judge an act, much less a man, with anything like absolute confidence. The impossibility of perfect sureness in the contingent world was what made Aquinas, the subtlest of minds, reluctant to deal with ethics. It was not the business of Tolstoy the novelist to preach against adultery or war. That he did not so preach in *Anna Karenina* is one of the reasons for its superiority to *War and Peace* as a work of art (though the latter is still superior as a work of life, the preaching in it being excisable and inessential); that his preaching was at the very heart of the story ruined *The Kreutzer Sonata.*

Mickey Spillane's vision is moral enough but not adequate. It is not even possible. The climax of *The Big Kill,* which is tough-guy realistic, consists of Mike Hammer's being saved by a crawling baby who shoots the villainess with a pistol in order to avenge his father's murder. Both Rousseauism and its inversion Sadism are as such inadequate. The veneer of conventionality is not adequate in *Moll Flanders,* and the commercial self-interest beneath the veneer is severely limiting. Murasaki's aristocratic stoicism is adequate, as are Manzoni's Catholicism, Chekhov's humane materialism, James's Manicheism, Richardson's use of bourgeois

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Protestantism (in *Clarissa*), Faulkner's pagan stoicism (in *The Hamlet*), Dostoievsky's Russian Orthodox Christianity. Murasaki's moral order was ample enough to permit her all the suppleness she was capable of; Richardson's was pinched and mean but he did not stay within it (as he seemed to believe he was doing); Dostoievsky's good fiction is the record of his struggle to create an order he could accept, rather than to reject all order or to accept one on mere authority. In every case the writer was free to see actual behavior as amazing—undetermined and unexpected. Such freedom was not necessary to a Bunyan, who wrote an autobiography and an allegory, but it was necessary to Louisa May Alcott, James T. Farrell, and Jack London: their work is realistic enough so that the absence of this freedom gives the slick impression that in real life moral decision is clear and easy, or the fraudulent impression that it does not exist.

The vision of a realistic writer is not of a given or fixed moral order. It is of individuals' behavior as seen according to a social convention and a natural psychology, and of their own and their author's beliefs. The trouble starts when he is a True Believer conceiving some social, psychological or religious system as being rigidly right (Fast in *Spartacus*) or when he is stupid or confused in his grasp of them (Faulkner in *A Fable*). For his job is not proximately moral ("Poetry makes nothing happen," said Auden); it is not for him to improve us directly, teach us a given set of rules, save us. His best job is to arouse and extend our wonder at the endless variety of human possibilities in the actual social, psychological, moral world, and to enlarge our sense of communion with one another. *If life is like that, I am not alone.*

*

Don Quixote and *War and Peace*—these are the incomparable. The reality each imagines is of a supreme wisdom, delight, and scope. They do not give that singleness and purity of experience which a short story is capable of, nor do they admit of that special awe accorded to perfection. But if either of these novels were pared and proportioned à la Flaubert or James, it could not include so much or penetrate so far. Doubtless, God's reality is perfect, but my reality contains sillier fantasies than the flimsiest tale

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Cervantes included in his novel and stupider ideas than Tolstoy's tiresome theory of history. A perfect story is the work of a would-be god. A full story of a great man will be flawed; giving so much of himself to it, he can not hide his own weaknesses. In his book I can see more of myself as well as more of life than in a godling's perfect book, and in more just proportions.

Don Quixote, the Knight of the White Moon's lance at his vizor, preferring death to renouncing his devotion to Dulcinea; Natasha coming to the wounded André in the shed: these are for me the highest moments in story. They reach as far as translucent prose can go. That is, neither passage quoted out of context has anything like the power of Othello's last speech or of Priam's suing Achilles for Hector's body. It is not the words of the scenes which rise so high, only the scenes imagined as happening and the speeches as spoken in life, and they need the large body of their stories. Just as both are entirely realistic on the surface, so both are drenched in dream-like romance—not just *Don Quixote* but *War and Peace* as well.

Tolstoy could write so realistically about the noble and rich because he was born to their class. Moreover, the fictional reality of the book is so powerful that one ceases to pay much attention to distinctions. If it seems so actual and is so real, why ask for more? But I imagine that it could be real only if it were also fabulous. ("Human kind," said Eliot, "cannot bear very much reality.") The army of one of the greatest conquerors in history is approaching a capital city which is in the throes of being evacuated and is about to be destroyed by fire. The family of as charming a young woman as exists in all literature has taken in a wounded officer whose people are trying to save him. This officer, by coincidence, is the young woman's former fiancé, a prince, capable of the highest spirituality, whom she had desperately offended by trying to elope with a scoundrel. When she discovers who the wounded man is, she goes in the dark to his bedside in her nightdress and purely begs the forgiveness which he purely grants. . . . Some of it did happen, all of it could have happened, it seems actual. True. But I imagine that its reality could not have been so great unless the likeness it created had found and held the form of moral dream.

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RICHMOND LATTIMORE

Witness to Death

Disconsolate I
from the thinning line
have seen friends drop and die.
All I called mine
has gone or will go
from its place under the sun.
This we know,
and nothing can be done.

Villon, Nashe, Dunbar,
to your great testaments
I too assent from afar,
bestow my violence,
and throw my rhyme
and rage in the feeding face
of the great pig of time.
Beauty gone from her place

wit wasted and lost,
promise killed with blight,
McCarter and George Frost,
Dilys, who was delight,
Gilly suddenly gone,
Cartwright killed in the air,
Forrester, Conklin undone
in their prime. Where, where

is the rose, and the great
heart, and the shine of wit?
I hate death. I hate
all who speak well of it.
Dunbar, Nashe, Villon,
we sang as best we could
for the sake of those who are gone,
and it does no good.

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Finnsburg

From the Anglo-Saxon

Then there cried out the king young in war:
"Neither dawn in the east nor a dragon flying,
nor on this hall the horn gables burning.
They bring on the battle; the birds are singing;
the gray wolf wails; the war wood thunders;
shield takes the shaft. Now shines the moon
drifting in the cloud. Death deeds are rising
that force upon us this folk's hatred.
Wake you, wake you my warmen all!
Holding your lindenshields hard think on bravery,
bluster in battlefront, bear you like men!"
Rose many a gold armed thegn girding his sword on him;
doorward they made their way, deadliest champions.
Sigeferth and Eaha drew out their swords,
while at the other door Ordlaf and Guthlaf
and Hengest himself held it behind them.
Guthere cried out now to Garulf in warning
not to risk his frank life on this first foray
hazarding his armor against the hall door,
since one hard in fight would have it from him.
But the daring hero asked openly above all
who was the fighting man holding the doorway.
"Sigeferth is my name," he said, "Secgan my people;
a warrior wide known. I won through many woes
and hard fighting. Here now is fated
which of two things you shall win from me."
Then in the hall was a huge noise of havoc
and the hard shields held in the hands of the fighters
and the bonehelms burst and the burgfloor echoed,
until in this grim fight Garulf went under,
first man to fall of the Frisian people,
Guthlaf's son with good men about him,
many huge bodies. The raven hovered
swarthy and gloom hued. Swordlight stood forth
as if all Finnsburg were flaming afire.

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Never have I heard how in heroes' battles
sixty battlethegns bore themselves better,
how young men better paid for the pale mead given
than his henchmen gave to Hnaef at his need.
Fought they for five days, fell not a man of them,
none of Hnaef's henchmen holding the doorways.
A wounded warrior went back on his way then
and told how his battleshirt was broken apart,
his warscarf no help, a hole in his helm.
The king of the people questioned him presently,
asked how the Danes were enduring their wounds
and after the young men. . . .

Souvenirs of Sicily

The crumbled busts asleep in the noon noise,
the cape of masonry from a lost day
pointing into south wind and soft blue miles,
the disembowelled shark in the bright bay,
the tall girl with the long beer-colored hair
laughing alone among her crowd of boys,
and, flirting by the gateway to the school,
young girls in black and blonde seraphic smiles,
papyrus strict as Egypt in the pool
distilled from springs too deep and cold to know,
the broken house with garbage on the floor.
The garden of the mind combines it so,
but if we go back, will all still be there?
Such flowers grow in the filth along that shore.

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THEODORE ROETHKE

Wish for a Young Wife

My lizard, my lively writher,
May your limbs never wither,
May the eyes in your face
Survive the green ice
Of envy's mean gaze;
May you live out your life
Without hate, without grief,
And your hair ever blaze,
In the sun, in the sun,
When I am undone,
When I am no one.

Her Reticence

If I could send him only
One sleeve with my hand in it,
Disembodied, unbloody,
For him to kiss or caress
As he would or would not,—
But never the full look of my eyes,
Nor the whole heart of my thought,
Nor the soul haunting my body,
Nor my lips, my breasts, my thighs
That shiver in the wind
When the wind sighs.

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His Foreboding

I
The shoal rocks with the sea.
I, living, still abide
The incommensurate dread
Of being, being away
From one comely head.

II
Thought upon thought can be
A burden to the soul
Who knows the end of it all?
When I pause to talk to a stone,
The dew draws near.

III
I sing the wind around
And hear myself return
To nothingness, alone.
The loneliest thing I know
Is my own mind at play.

IV
Is she the all of light?
I sniff the darkening air
And listen to my own feet.
A storm's increasing where
The winds and waters meet.

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JEROME M. IRVING

A Parting Visit with Robert Frost

We had met at the home of Charles Feinberg in Detroit to see Robert Frost. The morning had been clear and Frost had already come back from his walk. He was resting upstairs when Mr. Feinberg showed us into the library.

When Frost came down the stairs he walked slowly, taking each step carefully and looking at the room below him. He wore a loose-fitting grey suit and a very bright tie. His shirt had a wide collar that seemed to defy the tie. One could think he was going to take off the jacket and tie and go out and walk in the woods.

After a short period with the photographers he came back into the library and sat in a large, high-backed chair. He sat deep in the chair, resting his hands one upon the other. The lines in his neck folded one upon the other. The folds formed streams and tributaries running from jaw to ear. He was very animated in the early morning and he looked from person to person awaiting the first question.

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Frost, with so many young people entering the arts these days, do you feel that they should be further encouraged?

FROST: Oh, I suppose, I don't know. They must be discouraged too, you see. Life is like that, not encouraged too much. It's a competitive thing and very destructive. It's very cruel. I tell them, don't go into any of the arts unless you got a snout for punishment, 'cause you're going to get it on the snout.

That's all right, it's nice to have some encouragement, while most of the world will discourage them, so they'll have a hard time. Probably get nowhere, that's the gamble.

INTERVIEWER: You had a hard time. I'm thinking about your work before you were a published poet. Do you think young people ought to do this? Work with their hands?

FROST: Oh, I worked like anybody else, no harder than anybody else, just worked some, you know. You've got to earn a living haven't you?

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INTERVIEWER: Wouldn't you rather have earned your living with poetry?

FROST: No, Oh no, no, no, far from it. There is no living. There are only two or three people who have made anything like a living in America.

That's one of the things you have to teach the young.

Homer, the greatest poet of all, was a beggar through seven cities all his life and all seven of them claimed to have been his birthplace afterwards when the story was written. He was a beggar and probably recited in the courts, you know. He ate at the court with the important people, he ate either at the foot of the table or under the table with the dogs. That's the fate of poetry. It's a rough life and poetry is meant to be a rough life, I guess. There are very few rich people.

We don't know much about Shakespeare, he led a rather rough actor's life. He wasn't a noted actor, but he got enough out of it all to retire to the country in his old age once in a while. That was a playwright. He began as a poet and he was a poetic playwright. He wasn't famous in his time but he was successful enough.

Nils Bohr, the great scientist, somebody said to him: "You mustn't joke about the bomb, Nils. It's too dreadful a thing to joke about." He said: "It's such a dreadful thing there's nothing to do but joke." And so about poetry, such a dreadful thing, you've got to joke about it. And yet, if you go to college in the Humanities, more than half you read in the other languages in the past is poetry. It's funny, isn't it? So little paid—patronized here and there a little.

One of the sad things about the old world is the amount of toadying the artist had to do to get anything out of the rich and important. We don't have to toady so much here. One of the nicest things is the patronage of the colleges. You might try to toady a university, but it's hard to know where to get ahold of its toes to toady it.

The colleges do quite a little to foster poetry. A good many of them have one poet around, one artist of some kind, whose work is made reasonably easy for him. He'll have two courses, that's a six hour week, we'll say, and then he's not supposed to be on committees or go to faculty meetings, he's supposed to have his time to read and write. That's been the last forty years only, that's a new thing.

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Nearly the beginning of it was my time at Ann Arbor. I was among the first that were brought in that way.

You know, you've got to ask yourself, how you're going to handle it anyway, it's a very ticklish thing, you can't be writing poetry much of the time, you know, it isn't like writing novels. What are you going to do with yourself the rest of the time? You might as well be, you know, in some work, of some kind, teaching a little or preaching or working on a newspaper or something. You do all such things.

Of course, if you're rich—Amy Lowell who visited me at Ann Arbor here, she didn't need all that, she had a very large, rich purse, and she had lots of money. She's maybe an heiress many times over. She was a great worker at other things besides the poetry, wrote the life of Keats and all that. Great reader she was. A book publisher told me she was the greatest scanner of books in the United States—they were coming into the house and going out all the time. She picked them out for her library, a great library.

She had other interests, and her place in Brookline was a good deal of a farm, an estate, you know, with lots of flowers and hot houses and all that. But not many poets have anything like that. That made her believe that nobody ought to write poetry that wasn't rich.

INTERVIEWER: Do you believe that yourself?

FROST: You mustn't ask me what I believe, I am a religious man.

It's funny, she named a couple of rather noted poets of our time she said shouldn't have been in poetry, they were too poor.

They're more noted than she is.

One of them is, certainly, anyway. I'm so sure she said that of E. A. Robinson, one of the best of our time, but he wasn't wretchedly poor. He was favored in many ways by rich people that gave him things and in one book he made a small fortune, *Tristram,* didn't he? He died with an estate of seventy or eighty thousand dollars ahead. He did pretty well for a poor boy. I suppose after he had that big success, anything he did would do a few thousand a year, four or five thousand a year or something like that. But money has something to do with it, sales and all.

It's rather interesting in a country where people are measuring

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by money so much that this can go on at all, you know, that art is at all respectable.

It's the same in other countries. Now and then there's a poet laureate, somebody in England. None in my time has been a rich man. I don't know how much the government paid them. The government in England, they have a state allowance. Yeats had some of it, I know, and this poet I speak of who learned to write from the Detroit Free Press had about $5.00 a week from the government. I've heard him grind his tobacco and complain on what you could do with $5.00 a week.

I've just been in Russia where they sell many books, more than we do here, 500,000 and all that. The amount of reading over there is extraordinary.

I wonder how much money they're allowed to earn, you know, whether there's any control of that. Some of them looked comfortably off. I describe it to radicals here—they say it sounds mm, pretty middle class, bourgeois, you know, and it does. They have a home in the city and a home in the country, some of them, just the same as we do, and I think they're taken care of in some systematic way. I don't know what, I didn't go into that. I wasn't there poking into things.

I was thinking here that in my little town once—Ripton, Vermont,—where we're all friends, I thought of doing something about the library. It's a very small town, not many children, just one school, one district school, used to be six or seven but it's diminished. There didn't seem to be enough interest in it to go ahead with it. I thought maybe it would be nice to have the whole set of the Modern Library down in the school-house or somewhere. Nobody seemed interested.

But, in Russia, there was a rich, well-to-do author—I ought to say his name, but I can't—he had a pretty little estate in the country, frame house, nothing very big. It was such as you see in our village, with pine trees—nice grove of trees—and at his own expense he had built a little library off in the trees for the children of the neighborhood and I wandered over there myself alone. There were twenty or thirty children, one reading—no man or woman in charge. I can't imagine that here. That sounds very bourgeois to me, somebody too well off, a proletarian or some-

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thing. I wasn't looking for things like that, but it was very pretty, and one little girl sat there reading and the others all gathered around and there were book-shelves all around and the country-like place, unpretentious, all wooden frame, a little building—one of my pleasantest memories.

I wasn't getting things explained to me, I wasn't asking for explanations, I saw what I saw. That's just one picture of the kind of thing I saw over there. Not led up to by anybody, just accidental.

INTERVIEWER: Did you meet any Russian poets?

FROST: Some of them do very well. One has been over once and coming again, Yevtushenko—I know his name. I had a hard time learning how to say it. He's a young fellow of thirty and he's had wide sales. Very popular—he's a regular Byron in his life, kind of reckless boy, had a high old time, very popular, coming here to be popular. Friend of the revolution in Cuba.

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Frost, do you think that your poems were translated adequately for the Russians?

FROST: Nobody knows that. Just say that one of the charms of translation is that they don't know whether my poems are any good and I don't know whether their translation is any good.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any comments on your "Wall" poem and the way the Russians treated it.

FROST: I understand they misunderstood it. But, you know I'm only guessing at what they thought. You see, a good many Americans misunderstand it. They don't admire the way I straddled that fence, as the saying is, you know. It wasn't written with any of these politics in mind. It's perverted into all sorts of uses that I'm not responsible for and don't worry about too much.

You see, when you publish anything, it's a great—a great adventure—it goes to the world to see. The world can misunderstand it, some of the time, and understand it some of the time, so that's another of the things about it.

Somebody said to me in this way, what do you stand for? I said to him: "You wouldn't ask me that if you'd read my works." That put him in his place, politically and religiously and historically.

INTERVIEWER: The papers here had you quoted as saying that Khrushchev was a ruffian. Were you misquoted?

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FROST: Perhaps I ought to not say he's a ruffian, he's just rough and ready, see. More polite. He's a good one. He's not a man of goodwill as so many preach, you know, but he's a man of good nature. He is very good natured, hearty, jolly, rough in a way, you'd call it; coarse—coarse when he wants to be—probably a good deal deeper than I fathomed, you know, that was all right. We were both so affable that we may both have been self-deceived. Just good natured.

You know just one thing I ought to say about him. I think he's in what they call a "coming on mood." You know what I mean by that, coming on? You know, inclined our way. I think so. That's very slight, you know, you have to watch it, but I think he was. They better take advantage of it down there in Washington. It's a good chance, I think. They probably know more about it than I do. I didn't go over there for the government. I was invited by the Russians.

I went over there—as I go into anything—with full preconceptions. My interest is to see what preconceptions to correct and which to confirm.

INTERVIEWER: How many did you have to correct?

FROST: Mostly confirmed! I knew what was going on over there.

You can tell through the years; shaken down, you know, the nice word for it, that he used himself; that they—when I spoke of the severity of the early doctrines—he said: "of course those have naturalized." You can do anything with that word.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think about the Romantics?

FROST: You know, Tennyson never had a living until he was forty years old. He couldn't get married. Then he got on top of it and got made poet laureate and I suppose he had great success just in his books you see. He was really a successful poet. Browning wasn't very, but he had moderate means anyway. He wasn't rich but he had moderate means. He didn't have to worry.

Tennyson was a refined poet and rather a rough, rough, lord, rough man sexually. Browning was a rough poet—the other way around. Rather kid gloves, all that.

Value and no value. Two kinds of value involved there. Real value and money value and they got something to do with each other, but nobody knows what, or how to get them. Some of the ancient poets whose names are known and there's nothing to

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show for it, two or three poems, broken quotations at that and probably their names survived because some monk back in the Middle Ages with nothing else to do, something to copy, an exercise, happened to copy that from some other old thing. The poems had no value, but it looks as if they had because they survived.

That's another funny thing. Old time Catholic said: "Oh Time, whose verdicts mock our own," but even time isn't a sure judge. Some things survive by just luck. Take Sappho, those two poems of hers, most noted woman poet that ever lived. Many millions of people have translated them, tried their hand at the little poems, love poems, but she's nothing you think you'd make a great Shakespearean reputation on, you know, just had little scraps. So time isn't a sure judge any more than anything else is.

I was amused the other day—I was in a museum and a young curator led me around and there was a wire thing came down from the ceiling and went up again. I said: "You like that?" He said: "I like to live in my time," and I could have gone on and argued with him—"Some things last longer than others," but he had such a lofty air, I thought I wouldn't bother him.

"Oh Time, whose verdicts mock our own, the only righteous judge art Thou." That seems rather final, but it isn't. We don't know.

INTERVIEWER: They would like you to come to the door and say goodbye to the people.

FROST: To where?

INTERVIEWER: Only to the door.

FROST: All right. Let's go outside.

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JUAN GOYTISOLO

The Cross and the Face

THAT AFTERNOON I GOT A CALL from the barracks telling me that my tour of duty would start on Tuesday. I had, then, three days of freedom. My first instinct was to call Borés, who was just finishing his week at the Pedralbes barracks.

"My old man has gone to Madrid and left the keys to the car behind."

"I haven't closed my eyes for two nights," he replied.

"Whores?" I said.

"Bedbugs. The entire Officers' Quarters is infested."

By the time I arrived at the cafe, he was waiting. He was a little paler than usual, and showed me the marks on his neck.

"For once they aren't bite marks."

"What does your mother have to say?" I asked.

Borés emptied his gin and tonic in one long draught.

"Now that I'm in the army she's much more calm."

Manolo came over to take our orders with a napkin folded over his arm.

"What do you think of this clutter, Don Rafael?" He motioned with his arm toward the chain of loudspeakers hung up in the trees, and the official shields shining on the balconies of the buildings.

"Nothing but tourism," I said. "Everything gets more expensive and you have to do something to earn money."

"That's what I say, too, Don Rafael."

"It's not the same here as in Rome. . . . People here are full of suspicion."

Leaning back on our willow chairs, we watched some pilgrims march by. I felt terrifically thirsty and had three gin and tonics.

Borés inspected the parade of eleven nuns and seven priests.

"By the way, they say that when the American delegation comes, they're bringing an entire mulatto whorehouse along."

"Well, they have to have something to offer the public. It's awfully hot, you know, mobs of people. . . ."

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"What would you think about dropping in a minute?"

"At Emilia's?"

"Yes. Emilia's."

As we left, Manolo told us he hoped we would finish the night in good company. Although it was eleven, the streets were full of people. Organ music came from the loudspeakers. We stopped at the red light on Canaletes Street to let a group of female pilgrims go by.

"Do you think that's it?" Borés asked, putting his head out the window.

"Who knows . . . they certainly look well blended."

"Let's ask them to come with us."

"Remember what happened last time," I said.

In the Ramblas the way was blocked with people, and we were held up near the Concert Hall for nearly ten minutes. Finally we left our car in Altarazanas Street, and walked back along Montserrat Street. Most of the bars were closed, the few cafes open were packed.

"When we get there they'll tell us the river's run dry!" Borés said suddenly, pointing to the holiday lights strung up.

"You're an unbeliever," I replied. "On occasions like this one tosses money in the window."

On Conde de Asalto Street a procession was walking by behind a silver banner. A group of boys was chanting something in Latin.

Now we were only about seventy feet from Emilia's, and we looked at its facade, astounded. Its balconies, clearly visible among the neon crosses along the street, displayed the gigantic blue shield of the Eucharistical Congress.

"Fantastic!" Borés said. "Do you see that. . . ?"

"When no one was looking, they probably changed it into a chapel, too. . . ."

The entry light was out, and we climbed the stairs in the dark. On the landing we found two soldiers.

"You're both wasting your time," one said. "The place is empty."

"Where are the girls?"

"Moved."

We went back down. More banners were going by on the street, and we watched them silently a few seconds.

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"Shall we go to the Gaucho?"

"Good."

As we turned the corner I heard someone call my name, and I looked back. Ninochka had been watching the procession from a doorway, and motioned us to come back.

"Disgraceful . . ." she said, leading us into the vestibule. "Don't you have any shame? . . . today of all days. . . ."

She was dressed in black, in a jersey with long sleeves, and a high neck, and she was hiding her bright blonde hair beneath a graceful shawl.

"What is this disguise?"

"Shhh. Be quiet." Whenever she smiled, two dimples came. "They took every last one away . . . in trucks. . . ."

"When?"

"This morning." She pointed to the loudspeaker which was thundering away on the top of the lamppost. "The man there said that by the time the Nuncio arrived the city ought to be made pure. . . ."

"How about you?"

"I escaped by a miracle." She turned again to the loudspeaker, and made a face at it. "He says that we are not pure."

"Defamation!" I cried. "Calumny!"

"That's what I say." Ninochka arranged her mantilla with a flirtatious gesture. "Whatever they say, we are flowers. A little wrinkled and withered, maybe, but flowers. . . . I read that in a novel . . . *Daughters of the Pavement* . . . Do you know it?"

"No."

"It takes place in the Moulin Rouge, in Paris . . . it's very good."

"And where have they transplanted these flowers?" Borés asked.

"Out of the city. In the surrounding towns. To take some country air."

"Where, do you know?"

"Montse and Merche, they carted them to Gerona."

"We'll have to go there and console them," I said, "Don't you think?"

"Poor things," Borés murmured. "They must feel lonesome."

"Coming?" I asked Ninochka.

"Me?" Ninochka smiled again. "I am going to the Midnight Adoration . . . like Mary Magdalene . . . a Penitent. . . ."

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As we left, she bit my ear. She was terribly attractive in her mantilla and her chaste jersey.

"Do you think we'll find anything?" I asked Borés, as I started the car.

"It's still early. Why not? We can't lose anything."

In Paseo de Colón, the road was clear, and we followed the park fence around toward San Andrés.

"Maybe it's all a swindle."

"We'll find out on the road."

We had left the last illuminated shields behind us, and we were going about seventy on the empty highway. We made our first stop at Mataró.

"Have you seen a truck full of girls?" I asked a bartender.

"No, sir, I haven't." His eyes glittered with slyness. "But I have heard people say that more than five have gone by."

"Going toward Gerona?"

"Yes, toward Gerona."

We drank our two gins and left him a good tip.

"One of my customers—a lawyer—left in that direction just a few minutes ago."

Borés thanked him for this information, and we climbed into the car again. The motor had more life than ever, and in less than a quarter of an hour we had passed the Blanes highway.

On one of the mountainous curves we came up behind a black Lancia. The driver had glasses.

"That ought to be the lawyer," Borés said.

"The clown seems to be in a hurry, too."

"Pass him. If he kidnaps Merche, I'll skin him alive."

The "Chateau for Tourists" was lit up, and we stopped for a small drink.

"Have you seen a—" Borés asked, as we left, pointing to the highway.

"Sure," the barman answered, smiling. "Ahead of you."

At the Caldas crossroads we overtook the lawyer again. Borés rubbed his hands together excitedly, and let fly a string of insults through the window.

"Merche is mine, and Dorita is mine, and Mari. . . ."

About seven miles from the town we stopped for a man who was waving his arms at us.

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"Are you going to Gerona?"

"Get in."

The man climbed into the back seat without taking off his beret.

"There seems to be a celebration down there today," Borés threw out, after a few minutes.

"That's what they say. . . ." His speech had a heavy Catalan accent. "In my town all the girls are gone. . . ."

"How about you?"

"I'm going too." In the rear view mirror we saw him wink one eye. "I waited till my wife was in bed."

The outskirts were sound asleep, and I turned on Primo de Rivera Street toward the Oñar River. From the bridge I saw that the cafes on the avenue were lit up. A man selling mattress pads was going from one side of the avenue to the other, pulling a portable platform, and a group of young hoods was walking in the direction of the cathedral, letting out yells.

"Look," I said.

"Look at that. . . ."

The avenue presented an extraordinary spectacle. Scattered about on chairs, or leaning against bars, or slumped over benches and tables, there were dozens of silent women who looked at us as though we were an apparition from another world. The bell tower of a church struck two, and many of them were sitting slouched against the wall trying to sleep. Some had not yet lost hope, and signaled to us to come closer.

"This way, come on, honey."

"Just give me a good bed and I won't even charge you a penny!"

Borés and I made a path toward the shops. Boys here from all the towns of the district bargained with the women, laughing, and disappeared down the neighboring streets, accompanied at times by three or four. The hotels were full and did not have a room free. The lucky owners of an apartment or room slept free with the best-looking girls.

"Take me along, handsome. . . ."

"Come on. . . . Let's go sleep a minute. . . ."

In the first place we looked we found Merche. She was sitting in a cafe, smoking. When she saw us, she showed no sign of surprise.

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"Dominus vobiscum," she contented herself with saying, as a form of greeting.

"Ite missa est."

With an absent-minded gesture, she invited us to sit by her.

"You must excuse my living room being so dirty," she apologized. "My cleaning woman has joined a union, and refuses to work on Saturday."

The waiter made us aware of his presence by clearing his throat. Borés ordered two gins and another coffee.

"Standing guard at night?" he asked when the waiter was gone.

"The leisure classes, you know, we always sleep late," Merche answered.

Her face showed great fatigue. As usual, we could not tell when she was speaking seriously, or joking.

"We had a few hours to kill in your territory, and Ninochka told us what happened."

"It all began with the Tourist Office." Merche drained the last of her coffee. "Since we are uneducated, they gave us a trip . . . Cook's Travel Agency . . . See the World. . . ."

"Have you found a bed?" I asked.

Instead of answering me she turned to Borés with a smile.

"And you? Why are you here? Have they kicked out the sons of our best families too?"

"Only the depraved ones," he said.

"Ah . . . only the depraved ones . . . I thought so."

Her eyes fell shut with sleep. Borés exchanged a glance with me.

"My father has an office not far from here," he said, "If you like we could sleep there together."

"Thank you, love," said Merche. "You're sweet."

In silence we drank the two gins and the coffee. A woman was snoring at the next table, and the hoods were still roaming around yelling.

"How about you?"

"I'll drink another round, and then take off."

"In that case, call my house. . . . Tell them I spent the night in your studio."

I watched them go off, arm in arm, in the direction of the cathedral. Then I paid the check, and walked down toward the river. The women called to me again, and I drank two more gins.

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That night I absorbed alcohol as if it were water. I could have emptied a barrel by myself.

"We ought to have Eucharistical Congresses like this every year, my friend," a small man next to me said. "Don't you think so?"

I told him he was right, and if I remember correctly, we drank another together.

I don't know what time I got back to the car, or how I managed the sixty miles to Barcelona. When I arrived, the sun was up, and the first pedestrians were moving about on the streets hung with decorations.

All I remember is that a brigade of workmen was sweeping up the street where the procession was to pass, and that when I saw the balcony of my own house, I discovered there a magnificent shiny shield.

"That looks like one of my mother's ideas," I explained to the night man.

Taking care not to make any noise, I slipped into the bathroom and turned on the shower.

[*Translated from the Spanish by Robert Bly*]

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PETER DALE SCOTT

Translations from Zbigniew Herbert

The young poet and playwright Zbigniew Herbert has lived all his life in Poland, except for two years spent recently in Western Europe. Two volumes of his poetry were published in Poland at the time of the 1956 "thaw"; and a third, Studium Przedmiotu, *has just appeared. In 1961 three of his one-act plays were revived before a select Warsaw audience; and since then translations of his work have been published in* Encounter, *the* Observer, *and on the BBC.*

Various young Polish poets attracted attention after 1956 by their withdrawal from the ideological front of party or revolutionary slogans. Some, like Harasymowicz, preferred a world of private fantasy; but Herbert seems anxious to control, rather than to forget, the public experiences of his generation. Where others inflate the particular, he belittles the overwhelming. Using the long perspectives of his historical and philosophical-legal training, he presents terse sketches of World War II and its related disasters in a guise of detached candor, with the ironist's technique of control by understatement. Yet in this perspective it is not the individual but history itself, with its merely collective pressures, which shrinks in the dim folds of a larger pattern. Arion is the author of giddiness in a secular society, Marcus the last hope of order in a dissolving one; we feel that both are heroes of harmony for whom history has no place. Yet Herbert's dismissal of their illusions is neither Stoic nor Byzantine, but somehow weirdly pacific; his transcendent irony and pathos promise to endure by the way they haunt each other. Pasternak's Hamlet embraced the "mulishness of Providence"; Herbert's is rather the silent victim of its logos. The poet does not reckon the tragedy, but he is reasonable: perhaps after all there is a world familiar and even gentle beyond this terror.

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Arion

This is he—Arion—
the Grecian Caruso
concertmaster of the ancient world
expensive as a necklace
or rather as a constellation
singing
to the ocean billows and the traders in silks
to the tyrants and mule herders
The crowns blacken on the tyrants' heads
and the sellers of onion cakes
for the first time err in their figures to their own
disadvantage
What Arion is singing about
nobody here could say exactly
the essential thing is that he restores world harmony
the sea gently rocks the land
fire gossips with water without hatred
in the course of one hexameter lie down
wolves and roedeer merlins and doves
and the child goes to sleep in the lion's mane
as in a cradle
Look how the animals are smiling
People are living on white flowers
and everything is just as good
as it was in the beginning

This is he—Arion
expensive and multiple
the author of giddiness
standing in a blizzard of pictures
he has eight fingers like an octave
and he sings

Until from the blue in the west
the luminous threads of saffron unravel themselves
which indicate that night is coming close
Arion with a friendly shake of his head
says good-bye to

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the mule herders and tyrants
the shopkeepers and philosophers
and takes his seat upon the back
of his tame dolphin

—I'll be seeing you—

How handsome Arion is
—say all the girls—
when he floats out to sea
alone
with a garland of horizons on his head

To Marcus Aurelius

for Prof. Henryk Eizenberg

Good night Marcus put out the light
and shut the book For overhead
is raised a gold alarm of stars
while heaven talks some foreign speech
this the barbarian cry of fear
your Latin cannot understand
Terror continuous dark terror
against the fragile human land

begins to beat It's winning Hear
its roar The unrelenting stream
of elements will drown your prose
until the world's four walls go down
As for us?—to tremble in the air
blow in the ashes stir the ether
gnaw our fingers seek vain words
and drag the fallen shades behind us

Well Marcus better hang up your peace
give me your hand across the dark

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Let it tremble when the blind world beats
on senses five like a failing lyre
Traitors—universe and astronomy
reckoning of stars wisdom of grass
and your greatness too immense
and Marcus my defenseless tears

Two Drops

"No time to grieve for roses, when the forests are burning"
—Slowacki

The forests were on fire—
they however
wreathed their necks with hands
like bouquets of roses

People ran off to the shelters—
he said his wife had hair
in whose depths one could hide

Covered by one blanket
they whispered shameless words
the litany of the impassioned

When it got very bad
they leapt into each other's eyes
and shut them firmly

So firmly they did not feel the flames
when they came up to the eyelashes

To the end they were manly
To the end they were faithful
To the end they were similar
like two drops
stuck at the edge of a face

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Maturity

It's good what happened
it's good what's going to happen
even what's happening right now
it's o.k.

In a nest pleated from the flesh
there lived a bird
its wings beat about the heart
we mostly called it: unrest
and sometimes: love

evenings
we went along the rushing sorrow river
in the river one could see oneself
from head to toe

now
the bird has fallen to the bottom of the clouds
the river has sunk into the sand

helpless as children
and practised as old men
we are—simply—free
that is—ready to withdraw

In the night a nice old man arrives
and coaxes us with a deprecating shrug
—who are you?—we ask alarmedly

—Seneca—say the ones who finished grammar school
and those who aren't familiar with Latin
just call me: the deceased

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The Wringer

The inquisitors are in our midst. They live in vast subterranean houses and only the shop-sign WRINGER HERE betrays their presence.

Tables with flexed bronze muscles, powerful rollers, crushing slowly but with precision, a driving-wheel, which knows no mercy —are waiting for us.

The sheets, which they carry out of the wringer-shop, are like empty bodies of magicians and heretics.

The Wind and the Rose

Once in a garden there grew a rose. A wind fell in love with her. They were completely different, he—light and clear, she—immobile and heavy as blood.

There came a man in wooden clogs and with his thick hands he plucked the rose. The wind leapt after him, but the man slammed the door in his face.

—O that I might turn to stone—wept the unfortunate.—I used to go round the whole world, I used to stay for years at a time, but I knew that she was always there waiting.

The wind was aware that, in order really to suffer, one has to be faithful.

Episode in a Library

A blonde girl is bent over a poem. With a stiletto-sharp pencil she transfers the words to a sheet of paper and changes them into stresses, accents, caesuras. The lament of a fallen poet now looks like a salamander eaten away by ants.

When we carried him away under machine-gun fire, I believed that his still warm body would find its resurrection in his words. Now, as I watch the death of the words, I know there is no limit to decay. All that will be left after us in the black earth will be the dissipated sounds. The accents over nothingness and dust.

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THORNTON WILDER

Giordano Bruno's Last Meal in Finnegans Wake

ON ANY PAGE OF *Finnegans Wake* the reader finds a number of interwoven themes and to the difficulty of deciphering and isolating any one of them is added that of furnishing an explanation for their juxtaposition. I am about to show that pages 404 through 407 are largely concerned with Giordano Bruno's trial and torture and with his death at the stake which took place on February 17, 1600, in the Campo dei Fiori at Rome. Interwoven with this material are at least five other themes: The seven colors of the spectrum; the entrance of Shaun the Post in the first act of Boucicault's play *Arrah-na-Pogue;* the composition of a pack of playing cards; some events of the last days of Christ's life, together with the liturgical offices which commemorate them; and the account of a barrel of Guinness stout rolling down the Liffey to Dublin Bay. I shall consider here only the first four of these.

To readers who have not the volume before them I must emphasize that all these varied themes are being pursued simultaneously. By startling feats of ingenuity Joyce forces a phrase or a single word into service for two or more purposes at the same time. A "wheel" is at once a form of torture employed by the Inquisition and a playing-card in the Tarot pack. The "blessings of . . . Haggispatrick and Huggisbrigid" 404.35, are not only an allusion to this prodigious meal, to Shaun the Post's preferred saints, to a chorus in the distance singing the Trisagion, but to the fact that Bruno was a Dominican condemned by Dominicans. Because of their black and white habit the order was popularly identified with magpies; in Old English dialects the magpie was called a "haggis." The bird was also called a "margaret," (the French called *la pie "la margot"*) and we find that at this meal there is a "bulby onion (Margareter)" 406.7. We shall presently see what associations are set in motion by such words, not found in any dictionary, as "Juhn" and "lightbreakfastbringer." The style

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of *Finnegans Wake* may be called that of the "collocation of disparates." In the principal passages studied in this paper Joyce employs it for effects of grinding horror; but the novel is of wide diversity. Elsewhere by superimposing on one page a pubkeeper's wife, Homer's Hera, and a song by Robert Burns; or on another page Melville's Billy Budd, Eamon de Valera, and the Buddha he obtains effects of lyrical beauty or of savage satire. It can be said that this style is something new in literature and that by extending in various ways the function of metaphor it moves largely in the realm of poetry. The first impression one receives is that it is a work of comic intention, for verbal distortions always appear to us as proceeding from wit, even when they arise from the unconscious; but though there are innumerable puns in the novel, Joyce's interest is not primarily in the puns but in the simultaneous multiple-level associations which they permit him to pursue. *Finnegans Wake* appears to me as an immense poem whose subject is the continuity of what is Living, viewed under the guise of a resurrection myth. This poem is conducted under the utmost formal rigor controlling every word and in a style that enables the author through apparently preposterous incongruities to arrive at an ultimate unification and harmony.

Now to return to the four themes in the passage we are studying:

I suspect that the colors of the rainbow are here to remind us of another heroic person burned at the stake, Jeanne d'Arc. Her name like Shaun's is derived from John, and by one of those coincidences that so often gave support to Joyce's propensity toward superstition her name recalls the rainbow; she was indeed an *arc-en-ciel.* Moreover, both Bruno and Jeanne illustrate one of the most frequently recurring symbols in the book, the phoenix. Like the "bird of Arabia" they were consumed by fire and are continually reborn in the mind and spirit of aftertime. At the close of this paper I shall show that Joyce elsewhere associates Sainte Jeanne with Bruno.

The spectrum appears as "red," 404.25 (with the Russian "krasnapoppsky," papal red); "orange," 405.33; yellow, "guilbey" (German gelb, gelbe) 406.33; green, "pease, rice, and yeggyyolk," (the colors of the Irish Free State, giving us another yellow); blue, "starspangled zephyr" (star . . . sapphire); "indigo," 404.29-30; .27; .18; and purple, "mauveport," 407.21.

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The appearance of Shaun the Post from Boucicault's play introduces the heroine, "arrah" 404.4; Shaun himself 404.7; and Beamish (Mac Cool) 405.16. Page 404 gives us a general description of his costume as we see it in the theatrical documents and the name of the actor who played it for years on both sides of the Atlantic. The name of Chauncey Olcott appears elsewhere in the novel—where it is also associated with Shaun—as "my chancey oldcoat," 451.2. Here we glimpse "a classy . . . o'coat," 404.17. Other theatrical references are "suparior," 404.18 (*sipario,* Italian, a theatre curtain) and "hand prop . . . prompt side to the pros," 404.16. Behind "indigo braw" 404.18 we can hear Chauncey Olcott bringing down the house with the ancient Irish war-cry "Erin go bragh"—"Ireland forever."

One event from this play furnishes a beautiful symbolic idea recurrent in the novel. Arrah frees a man from prison by transferring the "key" to him by way of a kiss through the bars. The image is present in the last words in the volume. It is not Shaun, however, who is liberated though he is her lover. Beyond the fact that Shaun is a bringer of messages it is hard to see why the figure of the simple-minded postman is superimposed upon that of Bruno. But this is the principle of collocation. Just as in a moment we are to see an agonizing death presented under the image of an enormous banquet in a city bright with flowers and riotous with card playing, so it may be for contrast we are here shown a rural Irish scene, a merry-hearted youth, and a naive theatrical performance.

The pack of cards is displayed as follows:

On page 405, spades, "spadefuls"; clubs, "leave your clubs in the hall"; hearts, "knives of hearts"; diamonds, "the diamond bone," 406.16. The following are all on page 405: ace, "prime card"; king, "No mistaking"; queen, "the once queen of Balrothy"; jack, "his knives of heart"; ten, "up Dacent Street"—with Dublin accent, *decem;* nine, "nunch"; eight, "would aight through the months"; seven, "this even's"; six, "hundred and sixty"; five, " a pint," (Greek, *pente*); four, "fourpart"; three, "threepartite"; two, "twice." The joker is on the preceding page, "his popular choker," 404.25-26. In addition we are given "the Wheel of Fortune," 405.24, which is the tenth card in the Tarot pack. Readers may also find references to whist, whisk, tricks,

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trumps, and so on. Bruno was burned in a Jubilee year, 1600. Rome was filled with pilgrims from all over Europe. *Autos-da-fé* were part of the general "jubilation."

There are hundreds of allusions to Bruno in *Finnegans Wake* and in general Joyce identifies Bruno with himself as Shem—speculative, rebellious against authority, and—in his own eyes—persecuted. On many pages, however, he is an aspect of Shaun; yet Shem and Shaun are ultimately one, just as the stationery partners on Nassau Street, Browne and Nolan, become one: Bruno of Nola. (Another astonishing coincidence.) The passage before us occurs in the first of the Four Watches of Shaun. Bruno's name is constantly appearing in all of them, though it is not explicitly present in these pages unless we pick up the "brown" of 406.25. But the circumstances of his last days are given: the Pope was present at a session of the trial: the Russian papal red of 404.24-25; *tu es Petrus,* 407.15; and his stake was "peatrefired," 405.35. There were several bishops, "evectuals," 405.36, *"avic,"* 406.14; *"avec,"* 406.22. Here is his vicar, Paolo di Mirandola, "merendally," 406.1 (*merenda,* Spanish for "lunch"). The stake was set up in the Flower Market, "aflowering," 406.24 and "floreal," 406.36. The witness beholds the occasion with the "hundred and sixty odds rods and cones" of his retina,—yes, the number is "odd" for he has lost a zero to give the year 1600. The Papal Nuncio ("nunch," 405.17) had had much difficulty in extraditing Bruno from the Republic of Venice.

We have no record that Bruno was tortured, for the records have mysteriously disappeared from the archives; but we know that Campanella, author of *The City of the Sun,* a similar case, was put to the torture many times, once for twenty-four hours. Here we have already found the "wheel"; there is also the "grid" 406.5 and even a St. Lawrence, "Saint Lawzenge," 405.24, who is so often represented holding the gridiron of his martyrdom in his hand. One of the tortures of the Inquisition, particularly favored in Scotland, was the "boot," a construction of spiked iron enclosing the foot and leg. Remembering that "sparable" is a small nail used by cobblers, we are now ready to read 404.20-21 and .30-33. He had "thick welted brogues," (perhaps one hears "Maxwelton's braes") "on him hammered to suit the scotsmost public . . . iron heels and sparable soles . . . breaking over the ankle and hugging

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the shoeheel." Much later in the novel, H. C. E. will give his bride "pattens for her trilibies that know she might the tortuours of the boots," 548.29-30. Another torment was the "cangue" —a wooden frame like the stocks but carried on the shoulder and not attached to the ground. The Dominicans were particularly engaged in the ferreting out of heretics and by a pre-Joycean pun were known throughout Europe as *Domini Canes,* "Hounds of the Lord." Bruno was himself a Dominican and the General of the Order sat on his court. We are told elsewhere, 424.3-4, that Shaun had thought to "join the clericy as a demonican skyterrier." Here we read that he has "an Irish ferrier collar, freeswinging . . . from his shoulthern," 404.19-20. We are told that on the way to the stake Bruno's tongue had been tied; here we shall see that during the meal he will have some trouble in "getting his tongue arount it," 406.13. Victims were subjected to the "water" torture. Shaun was served "a clister of peas, soppositorily petty," 406.19,— the water was imposed in the form of an enema.

The execution itself is presented as one extended horrifying pun upon the words "stake" and "steak," together with allusions to frying and roasting and other forms of cooking. Of the steak-stakes we have, on page 405, "prime," "No mistaking," "round," "top," "porterhouse," "clubs," "chucks," "rump" (in "frumped." 405.28), "cold forsoaken steak," and on page 406, "round steak, very rare"; "Braten's," "saddlebag steak," "steak . . . pepper the diamond bone." He even had a grubstake, ("he grubbed his tuck all right," 407.2).

The joke is so appalling and Joyce's relish in his own ingenuities so evident that the tone seems to be one of mere savage derision. I turn some seventy pages to find a mitigation. Shaun has finished his sermon to the leap-year girls. He takes his leave. He will be missed, but will return. "Dearest Haun of all, you of the boots . . . lampaddyfair . . . our rommanychiel!" 472.20-22. Bruno was the author of a *De lampade;* we shall see in a moment why he is identified with the gypsies. Until his return, however, time will be

". . . . rived by darby's chilldays embers, spatched fun Juhn. . . ." (473.9)

Here are Darby and Joan, and the span between December and June. Here are two dialogues by Bruno: *La cena de la ceneri,* The Ashwednesday Dinner and its embers (elsewhere, also with

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the phoenix: "when the fiery bird disembers," 24.11); and the *Spaccio de la bestia trionfante,* the driving out of what was interpreted as the Pope. Seeing Darby and Joan and the age-levels implied by the months, we now read: by that time even the children ("childer" is a favorite expression of Joyce) of those now aged will have turned to dust, their fun over; just as Bruno and Joan of Arc will have become ashes. Joyce has compressed three allusions into the word "Juhn,"—the proverbial aged spouse, the month of June, and St. Joan. I suspect that the spelling is to remind us of Schiller's Johanna, "Die Jungfrau von Orleans."

Bruno was for Joyce the type of the phoenix, symbol of immortality, and by two more coincidences Joyce in his Paris apartment watched over two small date-palms (botanically, *Phoenix*) reminding him of Dublin's handsome Phoenix Park. To understand the continuation of this passage the following information is necessary: the Egyptian word for the phoenix bird was *Benu;* Bruno was born in the environs of Naples under Spanish rule; and here Joyce alludes to two powerful arias in Verdi's *Il Trovatore.* In *Stride la vampa* the Gypsy Azucena contemplates her imminent death at the stake and that of her mother before her; and in *Di quella pira* her supposed son Manrico sings of the same death. (Joyce has earlier invoked the first of these arias: "O murder mere . . . Thrubedore I did . . . striding on the vampire. . . ." 411.25-31.) We continue:

"Shoot up on that, bright Bennu bird. . . . Eftsoon so too will our own" (That is: Joyce's) "sphoenix spark spirt his spyre and sunward stride the rampante flambe. Ay, already the somber opacities of the gloom are sphanished. Brave footsore Haun! Work your progress! . . . The silent cock shall crow at last. The west shall shake the east awake. Walk while ye have the night for morn, lightbreakfastbringer. . . . Amain."

We know why he is "footsore." "The silent cock shall crow at last,"—when those who have denied their Lord will be confronted with their betrayal. "Light . . . bringer," "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" "Break fast," —Lent is over!

Bruno wrote a *De progressu.* "Work your progress!" What higher homage could Joyce extend than to identify Bruno's book with *Finnegans Wake* which, when those lines were written, was still entitled *Work in Progress?*

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JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

THERE OUGHT TO BE A WISTFUL LITTLE FAIRY TALE somewhere—in Perrault or, preferably, Andersen—about an unhappy drama critic who must review bad play after bad play until he is kept alive only by a transcendent yearning for the one good play that someday, somehow he will live to see and write about. Then, after an indescribably long wait, that play does come along, but the wretched fellow is so overwhelmed that his mind and fingers go numb and he cannot even roll a ball-point across the page. It is somewhat in this situation that the British non-musical revue, *Beyond the Fringe,* leaves one. It is thoroughly witty, adultly satirical, civilized down to its sharp-nailed fingertips: an evening in the theatre when the excitement of stage history is in the air. But there is little or nothing one can say about it. Not, perhaps, for lack of the appropriate vocabulary, but for the no less valid reason that further jokes must not be given away. Already there is the cast recording, the various newspaper accounts, and enthusiastic quoting and misquoting at cocktail parties. But even if the four sumptuous pranksters on stage were better yet than they are—which, without selling their souls to the devil, they could scarcely be—unless a g-string's worth of surprise is decently left them, they cannot maintain their efficacy undiminished.

So it is "Down, wanton, down!" to the urge to quote profusely, and let there be merely a few words about each of the four author-performers. Together, they constitute a large amiably misanthropic mosaic, depicting every absurd stridency of our world with hilariously condign distortion. There is Dudley Moore, a fallen cherub who carries his particular hell with him in the shape of a piano; but, deprived of that instrument of torture and self-torture, he can play gratingly atonal jokes direct on your funny bone. There is Alan Bennett, so jolly decent, so frightfully shy, such an awfully good sort, that—out of sheer reserve—he seems to be backing into his devastating impersonations, which, humbly bowing in turn, knife each of our pretensions in the back. There is Peter Cook, looking like every cultured or pseudo-cultured Briton there ever was, from Lucky Jim to Commander Whitehead, a veritable Cook's tour of all forms of charlatanism and cant. And there is Jonathan Miller, who looks like a Wystan Auden condemned to be the jester of a Borgia Pope, flits about like a hopped-up springbok, and makes faces piteous enough to melt the snow cap off an Alp.

Nothing, I am happy to say, is sacred to these four: everything from Macmillan to Shakespeare, from religion to the atom bomb, from the

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shiniest alpha to the crumbiest omega gets it from them both coming and going. Sublimely mad hatters, they whip up instant dunce's caps for everybody, and as, full of laughter and admiration, we take off our hats to them—wham! the dunce's cap is already on our own heads.

What a craven and witless affair, by comparison, is S. J. Perelman's *The Beauty Part.* With eagle eye, Mr. Perelman spots every cultural and social pretention that has been around long enough to become the cliché-monger's butt, or is so grossly exaggerated as to be attackable with impunity: harebrained Hollywood hulks, illiterate film producers, phoney art buyers, artists who sell out, best-seller writers, publishers of cheap magazines, reactionary, senile tycoons, flighty faggots, artsy cocottes, and Bennett Cerf. When Perelman was writing for the Marx Brothers, he had to be merely preposterously zany; when he was writing for *The New Yorker,* he needed to be only elaborately whimsical. Suddenly, confronted with a Voltairian theme—the painful initiation of a wide-eyed Yalie into the fraternity and sorority of swindlers and hypocrites—he is obliged to be satirical and can't make it.

There are further reasons for this failure. At times, Perelman seems to be peering through both halves of his bifocals, and images get superimposed and blurred. The Fleur Cowles-like publisher of a fancy magazine, surrounded by her flimsy battery of yea-saying no-men, cannot do double duty as the ruthless editor of a sexy-horror-story magazine ("A naked girl tied to a bedpost with a chimpanzee brandishing a whip? No more punch than a seed catalogue!")—obviously two entirely different breeds. Also, why ridicule things so monstrously laughable in themselves that any parody, even a far cleverer one than Perelman's, must turn into piddling anticlimax? The courtroom scene where justice is being jazzed up for the benefit of television cannot begin to compare with actual TV shows like "Divorce Court."

Furthermore, Perelman's lines are simply not funny enough. "Our son, which he is home from Yale for midyear," or "I thought there was a colored gentleman in the woodpile," or "Suppose Simone Signorette [sic] didn't shack up with that guy in *Room at the Top,* where would this great industry be today?" or "He was on the Dean's List, morning, noon, and night," or "It's Christmas Eve and the landlord shut off the gas and he's starving.—The landlord?" and oodles more of the same just don't do the trick. When everything else fails him, Perelman promptly pulls out a bit of Yiddish and sticks it into the mouth of whoever is stage center ("You'll be the chief *shames* of the whole goddam production," or "A public disturbance at the intersection of La Paloma and Alte Yenta Boulevards," or "Author of *The Joy of Cooking* and *Love and Knishes,*" and so on)—and everything else fails him altogether too often. Add to this such abject lapses of taste as having Bert Lahr do a scene in drag even though there are several overripe character actresses in the cast who could have done it at least as well, and you have an idea of the spirit that informs this mature entertainment.

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Matters are not helped by Noel Willman's uningenious direction, William Pitkin's uninteresting sets, Don Walker's unsavory incidental music, and performances that are, all but one of them, undistinguished. That one is not Bert Lahr's, which is routine, but Larry Hagman's appealing Candide *après la lettre*. Every once in a while Perelman gets off a viable joke, as when a sculptress is working in Castille soap on a Procter and Gamble fellowship, but for most of the time *The Beauty Part* is a jejune and, for the audience, degrading affair.

Bert Lahr plays five characters in *The Beauty Part;* Sid Caesar plays seven in *Little Me,* but even this quorum of the seven Caesars can only just make the show pass. As musicals this season have been going, *Little Me* is the best, but that is faint praise. True, Bob Fosse's dances are consistently good, the hugely talented Swen Swenson does a song and dance number that should stop the show in several neighboring theatres as well, the costumes and scenery are pleasing, and Neil Simon's book occasionally manages to amuse. But the jokes are sporadic, and the songs only ho-hummable. And though I have not read Patrick Dennis's non-book on which the show is based, I hope that it was at least obscene. The show is merely slightly tasteless, which comes from being chastely affectionate about something racily repellent (the rise of a sordid little courtesan from the lower depths to the upper four hundred) and from obfuscating its small social comment with cutie-pie throwing. Still, Sid Caesar can be funny, and the others, with the exception of Nancy Andrews, are all bearable, and there are moments when the show feels like a pretty decent night-club act with extra trappings and trimmings.

Oliver! is a rather more curious musical. Sean Kenny's sets and costumes are perfect both as theatrical design and illustrations for Dickens, and John Wyckham's lighting is sheer genius. To watch the scenery assume ever more magnificent and evocative shapes, to observe the lights create painterly chiaroscuros or exquisitely teasing transitions from murk to refulgence—these things are theatre as it was meant to be. There is also a cluster of highly animated objects performing beautifully under Peter Coe's direction. In the first act alone there are tin dishes dizzyingly swooping on and off a large table, crockery having a rattling good time jigging up and down a smaller one, multitudinous lumps of sugar rollicking inside a fat man's cup, hats materializing and dematerializing *presto magico* on assorted heads, coffin lids refusing—like Musset's door—to remain either open or shut, flying squadrons of oranges and tomatoes taking zestfully to the air, handkerchiefs condescending daintily to the ground (to be promptly and piously elevated again), pearls and coins cascading through the fingers of a miser, and, of course, pies doing their action painting on the human countenance.

But when people make their appearances as something other than adjuncts to the life of things, matters take a sharp turn for the worse.

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It is not that the actors are bad (Georgia Brown and David Jones are splendid, and all the others will pass muster), but that all they are given—or not given—to do is deeply saddening. What was a great book and a good movie (before it had to be reshot because of absurd censorship) becomes a hulking emptiness of a musical. Lionel Bart's *Oliver!* twists the dickens out of the original and comes up with unoriginal ideas, shopworn lyrics, and only two or three commendable tunes. Incidentally, one of the best numbers in the London production, Fagin's "You've Got to Pick a Pocket or Two," which is meant to become gradually a *hora* and a pseudo-Israeli folk song, is here carefully de-Semitized, like the character of Fagin, into mere Cockney.

This may be as good a place as any for an urgent digression. I think it is time for Jews to recognize the enemy—smugly self-congratulatory pieces of clannish vulgarity—and picket, boycott, or refuse to put on items like *The Beauty Part* or *Seidman and Son,* but not *The Merchant of Venice* or *Oliver Twist.* Thus last summer, when Joseph Papp mounted *The Merchant* in Central Park, grumbles and threats were heard from a variety of rabbinical and lay Jewish sources, yet Papp had bent over backwards to make Shylock—contrary to Shakespeare and sense—the hero of the play and the Christians black villains. (Some of them quite literally black, for—contrary to Shakespeare and history—one must populate half of Renaissance Venice with Negroes to prove one's liberalism.) Well, it seemed to me that if anyone might have thought of boycotting Mr. Papp's *Merchant,* it was the Council of Christian Churches. Now we have an *Oliver!,* written by Lionel Bart, a Jew, bowdlerized by other Jews for fear of displeasing still other Jews. This nonsense must cease: the emasculation of such works (even indifferent ones, like *Oliver!*) is liable to give rise to rather more anti-Semitism than it might countervene.

Three musicless comedies have also gained popularity on Broadway, even though all three suffer from considerable deficiencies. S. N. Behrman's *Lord Pengo,* based loosely on Mr. Behrman's study of Duveen, is based equally loosely on the requirements of the stage. Behrman is quite rightly fascinated by the figure of a rich, successful, mildly Machiavellian manipulator of human beings, a gentleman scoundrel with Odyssean wiles and Felix Krull's talent for giving emotional fulfillment to his willing victims as he cons them. But the scoundrel as art dealer does more than that: he brings culture where culture is not really wanted, makes money out of spreading it (as who else does?), and ends up as the true benefactor of mankind when his clients leave their collections to museums and the public. This subtle juggling act with black and white balls is not without philosophical significance, neither is the notion of the manipulator as artist. Behrman's Pengo is "a visionary—but unlike most visionaries [possessing] the gift of reality." And (though one wishes Behrman did not thrice repeat this insight) "for him selling was a disembodied activity, like prayer," the

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satisfying of a noble urge: "I try to give [the buyers'] amorphous life some direction, some shape, some significance." And the finest revelation is of the mutual need, the shared joy of the manipulator and the manipulated underneath the haggling, the battle of wits, the putting one over on the other fellow—out of which comes a left-handed affection and even a kind of therapy.

The true picaresque hero is a psychologist as well as a rascal: Lazarillo de Tormes, as a mere child, realizes that "there are many people in the world who run away from other folks only because they don't know themselves." It is on similar psychological perceptions that Pengo operates, but the trouble is that suave, persistent, slow-working wiles are not the stuff dramas are made on. Epics and novels, yes; but not plays, which need conflict. So Mr. Behrman drags it in in the shape of a rebellious son complete with appropriate platitudes ("I don't seem to get a chance to talk to you, Father!"). Out of love for Pengo, Mr. Behrman, moreover, neglects the other characters, and clients, in any case, are not ideal dramatic fare. Devoted but tough female secretaries, for that matter, have long since had their day.

Despite urbane dialogue and some bubbles of iridescent fun, *Lord Pengo* is weighed down with *longueurs* and fillers and a general feeling of fatigue. Nor is the author helped by Vincent J. Donehue, the director, who has an uncanny ability to make any production look like a staged reading, and the only surprise he offers us is that the actors are not actually carrying scripts in their hands. There are, however, delightful performances from actors who know how to ignore direction, such as Charles Boyer, Brian Bedford, and that marvelous furrowed monolith which is Henry Daniell.

Never Too Late, on the other hand, is the flimsiest of farces, depending for its humor on the fact that an elderly tyrant and his middle-aged, exploited wife are about to have a baby, which shakes up the entire household and, naturally, makes everyone in the end better or happier or both. The author, Sumner Arthur Long, meretriciously cashes in on the pathetic pseudo-salaciousness of late-blooming paternity, and the vicarious glee this infuses into middle-aged audiences. But the jokes are too old and feeble to beget any merriment in anyone below the age of indiscriminate consent. However, Paul Ford and Orson Bean are extremely able comedians, and Maureen O'Sullivan, as the expectant mother, has enough charm to make up for the senility of any baby's father.

The French original of *Tchin-Tchin,* by François Billetdoux, is said to have been an unassuming little two-character tragicomedy about an Italian and an Englishwoman whose respective spouses have run off with each other. The two forsaken ones try to console each other in the obvious way, fail, but eventually achieve a kind of bittersweet, boozy friendship that will somehow see them through. The American version, by Sidney Michaels, transferred the setting to New York,

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added one speaking and several non-speaking parts, piled up enormous realistic settings, put what was meant for a tiny intimate theatre into a large and cavernous one, and inflated and underscored everything. If "tchin-tchin" is really, as reputed, the Chinese for "hello and goodbye," it is certainly the treatment that was accorded the original. Small wonder that the author has been sending the American producers anything but billets-doux. On the credit side, it must be noted that Anthony Quinn manages to be quite endearing most of the time, and that Will Steven Armstrong's sets are very striking white elephants indeed. But Peter Glenville has directed the play glibly and ostentatiously, and Margaret Leighton, except in one fetching but brief scene with a punching bag, gives a synthetic, unhumanized performance.

Meanwhile the serious drama managed to come up with nothing more than *Calculated Risk* by Joseph Hays. This is the story of a dissension-torn, medium-sized textile business in New England about to be gobbled up by a ruthless and fraudulent shark, and the desperate fight of the president to save his company. I doubt that this kind of subject lends itself to anything better than, say, Mirbeau's *Les Affaires sont les affaires,* but even that mediocre play is concerned with people, whereas *Calculated Risk* is all plot: who is the quisling on the board of directors, what will the shark's next move be, how can he be outwitted? Certain human values are superimposed, but they are no more than decals, and for the rest, the play is all suspense—if, that is, you can care about the fate of Mr. Hays's textile mill which grinds slowly and with exceeding small returns.

Since the producers broadcast loud squawks about how the newspaper strike caused the premature demise of *Tiger Tiger Burning Bright,* an allegedly distinguished play about which Howard Taubman wrote a rave review, let us look at the subject of the producers' and Mr. Taubman's ravings.

Tiger is the story of a New Orleans Negro family in which everyone is demented, debauched, or deluded. The motivation of the characters remains obscure, their talk is frequently arty, and they do not engage our sympathy, by and large. Peter Feibleman, who adapted the play freely from his own novel, is guilty, moreover, of taking a patently white, middle-class situation and dying its face black, forcing it down a social rung or two, peppering it with some Williamsish violence, and hoping to make up for the loss of reality by gains in sensationalism and timeliness. But nothing is ever gained by reversing the Meredithian apothegm and letting the plot spin the passions.

The most interesting thing about the play is that the tigerish hero was, in the novel, a homosexual male whore, whereas in the play he is, though still a male whore, a decorously heterosexual one. The decorum was, I suspect, inflicted by Joshua Logan, the director (a great rewriter of plays from Chekhov to Inge), who took the homosexuality out of the center of the play only to smear it all over the periphery.

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Thus we get a whole additional part of the set, the hero's bedroom, serving only to show him to us undressing, and we see him repeatedly bare-torsoed, and in passionate embraces with his mother. Even the movements Logan imposes on the hero are somehow unnatural, including crouches we doubt ever got crouched in real life.

Mr. Feibleman's dialogue, when it is not trying to be profound or poetic, does occasionally come off, as in "Sister, maybe you better tend to your own life.—I don't have a life.—Well, be glad of that." But it can just as easily fall into cuteness: "I didn't imagine it, it's just the naked truth.—Well, dress it up a little. I don't want nothin' naked around my house." On the plus side, too, is Diana Sands's entrancing performance, fitting together honeyed, hypocritical solicitousness with raw cupidity and carnality as neatly as the two sides of a finely-wrought medallion. And Cicely Tyson does an expert job as an outspoken, saucy little baggage. But the others, including Claudia McNeil, Alvin Ailey, and Ellen Holly, give performances that range from routine to embarrassing. Let us, despite Mr. Taubman, not shed tears over Mr. Feibleman's experiment in melanism which abounds in lines like, "I wish I could cry! I am so damn young—why can't I cry?"

The newspaper strike, however, did not in the least impede the rip-roaring business that *Desire Under the Elms* is doing at the Circle in the Square. Regrettably—for this totally unconvincing production of an inferior play deserves to be seen by fewer people.

There is very little excuse, in the first place, for doing *Desire* in the round: without elms, without the feel of the farm, with the same bed serving various people in turn, with the whole shape of the house being constantly reshuffled so that its topography cannot even be imagined. Thus the brooding atmosphere, the only interesting character in this attempt to transplant the spirit of the Old Testament into a New England setting, is cut out of the play. What remains is unsatisfactory acting and direction. Colleen Dewhurst, as Abbie, comes off best, but it is difficult to believe in her physical appeal for even one generation of men, much less two. There is technical assurance in her acting, but not that troubled yet enchanting femininity which alone could make her murder of her child look convincing and seem forgivable. George C. Scott, as Ephraim, indulges in little else but snarls, snorts, and the delivery of his lines in either a rabid whisper or a maniacal fortissimo—well below or beyond the range of the normal human ear. But what reduces the evening to utter risibility is Rip Torn's Eben. Mr. Torn speaks ever in a low deathbed tremolo, rising, at times, to a mortuary croak, the total effect being a kind of vocal *ménage à trois* consisting of Uriah Heep, Charlie McCarthy, and Poe's Raven. His movements are a perpetual arrested swagger, and the only alacrity is in his eyes, whirling around restlessly in their sockets like Eugene O'Neill in his grave.

Disconcerting, too, is José Quintero's direction: it becomes pro-

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gressively more obvious to me that Mr. Quintero cannot control his performers sufficiently. There is, for instance, no reason for letting George C. Scott read a line like "I'm getting ripe on the bough" as "I'm getting RIPE!!! [Pause, then whispered:] On the bough." Nor is there much to be said for such awkward stage business as when Eben, hearing that his child has been smothered, falls on the floor, very deliberately reaches over for his carpetbag, clasps it to his body and starts rocking it as though it were a baby. And as if that were not enough, a little later Abbie presses her rolled-up shawl to her middle, as if to shelter a frightened infant. The production, in short, leaves much to be desired under the absent elms.

But Off-Broadway boasts at least one half of a rewarding evening in *The Pinter Plays. The Dumb Waiter,* to be sure, is in Pinter's worst eclectic manner. Two inept hired killers are waiting for orders in the basement of an abandoned restaurant, and receiving crazy requests for food through a dumb-waiter, which they frantically try to meet with the measly contents of their lunch basket. The final order reveals that the awaited victim is one of them, whom the other must kill. Throughout the play one is acutely conscious of Pinter waiting for Beckett to write him some better lines. But the second play, *The Collection,* written for television and so, presumably, obliged to be a little more communicative, does evoke splendidly the queasy ambience of two unwholesome households, one homosexual, one heterosexual. The kept boy and the wife who wears the pants may have committed adultery, which leads to blackmail, threats, minor violence, and a barely breathable atmosphere of domestic nastiness. The question at the center remains unanswered in a somewhat Pirandellian fashion, but around the grain of mystery the play secretes its substance like an ominously glittering black pearl. It is cogently directed by Alan Schneider, and Henderson Forsythe, James Patterson, Patricia Roe, James Ray, and a lovely little white kitten act it most persuasively. No one, to my knowledge, has captured more compellingly than Pinter has done here, the mingled playfulness and malice so typical of homosexual "marriages."

One may well shudder at the horrid neologism "anymore" in the title of Tennessee Williams's latest play, *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore,* but the play itself promptly supplies many far better causes for shudders. One would have to go back as far as *The Purification* to find a comparably abortive play in the Williams corpus. The characters are either wooden or preposterous, the plot could not involve one less, and the dialogue surpasses anything in Williams for long stretches of barren waste littered only with the skeletons of jokes gone astray. Take the pretentiousness of *Camino Real,* the dishonesty of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* or *Sweet Bird of Youth,* and the dullness of *Period of Adjustment,* roll them into one, and you have an inkling of *Milk Train.*

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The rich Mrs. Flora Goforth is dying simultaneously in three villas on an Italian hilltop. Night and day, she is dictating her inane memoirs through ubiquitous walkie-talkies to her harassed secretary. To her comes a starving young poet in *Lederhosen,* Christopher Flanders, bringing a three-day-old hunger, a slender volume of his verse, translations of Hindu lore, a mobile he has constructed, and great good looks despite the advanced age (for a gigolo) of 34. The secretary warms up to him, but the selfish and ludicrous Mrs. Goforth, who is absurdly deluding herself about her impending death, will not feed him unless he sleeps with her. Another despicable hag from a neighboring island informs her that Chris is known as The Angel of Death, because the elderly ladies he had attached himself to all died shortly thereafter. But this neighbor may be lying, for she wants Chris for herself, and he has a downright charismatic account of what he was able to do for those ladies while they lasted. There ensues a contest in which Mrs. Goforth tries to starve Chris into making love to her, but fails; he, however, manages to implant the seeds of salvation in her before he leaves.

That indefatigable mystagogue, *Time* magazine, with a little help from *The Pilot* (more overtly devoted to scholasticism), has already explicated for us the profound allegory of the play. Chris is a combination Christ and St. Christopher, Mrs. Goforth errant mankind about to kick off unsaved, the neighbor is the Devil tempting Christ on the mountain top, the four days without food a tithe of Christ's forty-day fast, Chris is 34 to denote that the action takes place after the crucifixion, and so on. How they could miss out on the mobile as the *primum mobile* with its planets and fixed stars, I cannot imagine, for Flora is left at play's end contemplating a slightly Calderized version of the army of unalterable law. No doubt, much of this elucidation is, alas, relevant, but however heavenly *Milk Train* may be on the anagogical level, it breaks down on the literal.

Consider, first, the language. For wit, we get, "Men clutched at my legs trying to dismount me, so they could mount me," or, "Do you trust anyone, Mrs. Goforth?—Certainly not. Not anyone human. I trust dogs, all except poodles. I've never trusted a poodle." For repartee: "You have nice teeth.—Thank you.—Don't thank me, thank the dentist.—I never go to the dentist.—Then thank the Good Lord for the calcium you sucked in with your mother's milk." Or, "We could play double solitaire.—That's all we are playing now: solitaire without cards." This last, of course, verges on profundity, of which we also have examples like, "Has it ever struck you that life is all memory, except for each passing moment?" And for poetry, we get, "His lovely, lovely young head—it broke like the shell of a songbird," a certifiable synecdoche, to be sure, or: "Dying under that angry old lion, the sun; under the far-away stars. . . ."

But that is not all. The play gives us once again that pederastic

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image of the coveted bedfellow transubstantiated into an angel—sometimes, as in Cocteau's *Orphée,* an angel of life, but frequently, as in Albee's *The Sandbox,* an angel of death. Now, I find it difficult to accept a Christ whose loin cloth is a pair of gibbous *Lederhosen,* a Savior whose sayings are apt to be, "I'm all through with that loveless love bit—I can't make that scene any more." (Beg your pardon—"anymore.") Aberration should not be confused with salvation: the sacramental bread is not to be found in a basket. Or take the scene in which the bloated, repugnant old Mrs. Goforth, who has just spat blood, tosses out her nightgown from offstage and tries to lure Chris into her bed by alternately enumerating her hippopotamus charms and insulting or threatening. Is this parabolic? Is it supposed to be a proof of Chris's holiness? God knows, little as it means to resist a siren out of Hieronymus Bosch, it is the only concrete specimen of Christian morality we are treated to. Or is all this just a ghastly *frisson?* I seriously doubt that such total absence of aesthetic values could prove ethically valuable.

The play is not improved by Hermione Baddeley's anile crudeness or by Paul Roebling's uniform blandness and finishing-school vocalization. The sets of Jo Mielziner and the staging of Herbert Machiz are equally devoid of style and invention; but Mildred Dunnock, as the reptilian neighbor, and Ann Williams, as a harried, somewhat soured innocent, give irreproachable performances that are oases for the eye and ear. Mr. Williams's scatological eschatology notwithstanding, I don't believe you can get to heaven by milk train.

NORMAN N. HOLLAND

Not Having Antonioni

A TENSE AND BRILLIANT seven-minute montage of fifty-eight shots, none of which shows the principals, brings to their mysterious and frustrating end *L'Eclisse*[1] and Antonioni's trilogy. It is a little difficult to see why *L'Avventura, La Notte,* and *L'Eclisse* constitute a trilogy, but then it is a little difficult to see why anything in Antonioni, and that is the whole pastoral point. The plots of the first two might require

[1] *L'Eclisse.* Written and directed by Michelangelo Antonioni. Screenplay by Antonioni, Tonino Guerra, Elio Bartolini, and Ottiero Ottieri. Photography: Piero Poletto. Music: Giovanni Fusco. Produced by Robert and Raymond Hakim. Not having a stopwatch or a moviola, my figures on the ending come from Ian Cameron's excellent study in *Film Quarterly,* Fall, 1962.

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as many as four sentences to state, but you can do *L'Eclisse* in two. Vittoria and the intellectual Riccardo have come to the end of a long affair. After their break, Vittoria takes up with a somewhat crude stockbroker, Piero.

Now, if this were a proper review, I would go on to dilate that précis, setting out scene by scene the innermost thoughts and feelings of the characters, as though some telepathic revelation had been vouchsafed me (and other critics would announce in other reviews with equal certitude other emotions). This is to find in Antonioni that "internal neo-realism" the French critics came up with in *Cronaca da un amore* (1950). Antonioni has since denied the charge, but this is still the way Antonioni reviews for the artier film magazines go.

At last, though, the rural returns are coming in (I am thinking of Brendan Gill in *The New Yorker* and Donald LaBadie in *Show*). They tell us Antonioni, so far from giving us the inner life of his characters, is obsessed with "dehumanization"; the theme of *L'Eclisse* is "the diminution of man, the subject, and the triumph of the inanimate, the object." Certainly, anyone who consults Ian Cameron's informative monograph or Antonioni's own long interview with cinema students[2] cannot fail to come away with the impression that Antonioni sees an actor "as being only one element in a given scene; I regard him as I regard a tree, a wall, or a cloud, that is, as just one element in the overall scene" (a remark which I have lifted out of its context because it is curiously paralleled in *L'Eclisse:* "There are days," says Vittoria, "when a table, a chair, a book, or a man are all the same"). Antonioni stresses in his interview the way he improvises his shooting from "the working rapport between the actors and the background," as though actors and things were interchangeable parts.

Dehumanization there certainly is, but at the same time Antonioni's style systematically creates the impression that we know a very great deal about his characters. His camera follows them an unusually long time, he uses close-ups to an extraordinary degree, and his shots often look over a shoulder at an actor as though the camera itself were taking on the very thoughts of one character as he looks at another's face.

But it is very difficult to tell from the outside what *homo sapiens* is thinking; is it easier with *homo cinematicus*? "There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face," sighed Shakespeare's Duncan. What would he have said if he had ever seen Monica Vitti? Her face, at least half the time she is on the screen, is utterly mask-like, as opaque as a figure out of Léger or the classical period of Picasso, a face that speaks volumes but says very little. And the faces of Antonioni's other actors seem to approximate hers the way the rest of the arts aspire to the condition of music. She gives us a smile of pleasure, a *moue* of distaste, a blank of indifference, yes, but surely

[2] Reprinted in *Film Culture,* No. 24 (Spring, 1962).

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that Doric face is not what expresses the Byzantine and reticulated emotions the critics have discovered.

In short, the critical division reveals the artistic one. The interior drama we imagine into Antonioni is actually a drama that swings radically back and forth between close-ups that give us the illusion of seeing inside the characters and shots of external objects that really tell us what is going on inside. If there is any style Antonioni's echoes, it is that of Renaissance pastoral romance. His characters have exactly the same vagrant opacity, the same tendency to merge with the scenery as those of Tasso or Guarini, Sidney or Spenser; indeed, Antonioni's speech at Cannes expressed a touching (in that setting) nostalgia for the Renaissance. Antonioni's style is the dialectic between thing and psyche, and once we have understood that, we can turn back to what is, after all, the subject of this review.

Possession is the key idea in *L'Eclisse*. The opening sequence shows Vittoria breaking off with Riccardo (Francisco Rabal), the *mise en scène* a closed, intellectual room, heavy curtains shutting out the day. Books, paintings, objects press in on us from all directions. An electric fan only emphasizes the stifling, self-conscious atmosphere in which the very air seems acquisitive. She "wants happiness." He is unwilling to let her go. When she bursts free, he follows her for a final temporizing. Later, at night, he will tomsawyerly throw pebbles at her window.

Piero, the second lover, is completely and delightfully the opposite. As played by Alain Delon, he takes on some of the sprightly, devil-may-care quality of Cassel in *Le Farceur*. Where Riccardo is possessive, we always see Piero in the context of relinquishment, paradoxically, since he is in the business of making money. As a floor man in the Borsa, millions pass through his dancing fingers. He gives a pocket electric fan away; he shoos away the *bestiola* he had a date with. A drunk joyrides his Alfa—who cares? When he takes Vittoria to an apartment, it is his parents', not a room intensely his own like Riccardo's. He offers her chocolates, but the box is empty, and they laugh. When they kiss, it is through glass, and before they make love, their hands play out a last flirtation. At the end, we do not know if their affair is permanent or not—that is Antonioni's point: we ought not to have such certain knowledge; let us exercise restraint in our possessing of the film. And it is part of Antonioni's point, too, that it is the intellectual and socialist Riccardo who does not understand this reticence; in the topsy-turvy world of Antonioni, the businessman is the Pierrot.

The slow freight of episodes brings out the same idea. The Borsa scenes set off a Hitchcockian fat man who can lose millions and simply take a tranquillizer against Vittoria's grasping mother who haggles with a fruitseller over twenty lire and is willing to peddle her daughter to Riccardo to cover her margin requirements. The mother tries to hold the past in photographs, just as one of Vittoria's neigh-

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bors, a girl whose husband holds land in Kenya, has the possessions of Africa in her apartment. The camera's image merges into her photographs as though they had actually brought a piece of Kenya with them. She and her husband are committed to trying to hold onto their land (which she does not care about). By contrast, Vittoria, in a blackface which links her to the dispossessed natives, spear in hand, twists and capers a Kenyan revue. The next day, she is flying in an airplane with the girl, who suddenly says, "Fly through that cloud," as though she could not stand to see it floating there, intact, unpossessed. Drops of water appear on the wings; she clutches herself in a sudden chill. Possession is ominous, which brings us to the final seven minutes and the fifty-eight shot montage.

Vittoria and Piero have made a date ("Tomorrow and tomorrow and tonight"), but we do not know if they will keep it, nor should we care, for at this point Antonioni is making us follow his own moral and relinquish the major characters. When we last see Vittoria, she is looking up at the trees in the park, seeing them as like the huge trees of Kenya. She seems to accept them as common, free to all, and the film (and trilogy) ends with a magnificent crescendo of images which do two things. First, they recapitulate (without repossessing) the events of the film; that is, they remind us of the events, but from outside, as background, not really taking hold. More important, these images are of what is open to all, not personal to Vittoria, Piero, or Riccardo: park trees and city streets; a nursemaid wheeling another woman's child; buses (as opposed to the private cars throughout); a newspaper telling of peace and war; the unfinished and open building beside which the lovers met; water, above all, water now released and flowing which had been held like holy water before, water which now symbolizes the flow of experience of which Vittoria has become a part again, a flow which cannot be grabbed by anyone as Riccardo (and even Piero, sometimes) would like to do. The final image is of a street light, bright and common as the sun, a brilliant contrast to the opening shot of the film, Riccardo's table lamp shining on a book in his closed, personal apartment, and a contrast, too, to the sequence which opens *L'Avventura* and the trilogy, the old father complaining that he is losing his villa and his daughter. These images of the open, the shared, the common remind me, perhaps irrelevantly, of an item in the Freud apocrypha. Someone asked him if psychoanalysis would make a man happy. "No," he answered, after thinking a moment, "but it will restore him to the unhappiness common to all mankind." This is Antonioni's point, his catharsis, his kind of having.

Once we recognize that Antonioni's theme is "having" (in all its senses, sexual and intellectual, as well as predial), a lot of his incidental imagery comes clear. For the dehumanizing Antonioni, "incidental imagery" includes the characters, particularly the minor characters who serve largely as scenery reflecting the majors. The major charac-

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ters tend to come in a triad based on wanting to have and not unlike the pattern of Renaissance pastoral: A wants B who wants C who doesn't care. There is a man who seeks to possess; an inspirational figure who relinquishes, who doesn't care about possessing; and a woman who is dragged into the possessing game (or, in *L'Eclisse,* released from it). The so-called *andante* sequences in which a woman takes a long, slow walk on a street and is ogled (or, in *L'Eclisse,* ogles) mark the moments of transition either into or out of the world of having and being had. So do the sequences in which a character changes identity, blond Claudia's putting on a brunette wig in *L'Avventura* or Vittoria's blackface routine (which may be the eclipse of *L'Eclisse*).

· Buildings are the woods of Antonioni's urban pastorals, and they work in several different ways. Basically, we possess them and they possess us. They symbolize the longing of Antonioni's ineffectual men to grab what cannot be held, for example, in the wonderful long shot in *La Notte* of Giovanni on his balcony like a single bee held in a gigantic hive as he waits for his wife whom he doesn't really want, anyway. Conversely, the unfinished, open building beside which Vittoria and Piero meet images their unrestrained, unpossessive relation: the building is neither holding nor held—yet. In general, old buildings like old ways hold crowds of people; new ones are empty. The omnipresent walls in *La Notte* suggest the limitations that bind the characters and all of us. By contrast, the open landscapes, the volcanic isle in *L'Avventura,* the golf course in *La Notte,* show man in his naked state; they are symbols of freedom or escape which are accepted by those who can (this is why Ana disappears in *L'Avventura* and we never do find out what happens to Vittoria and Piero in *L'Eclisse*); the rest run for cover or clutch possessions (the grisly effort of Giovanni in *La Notte* to have his wife in a sandtrap).

"Painting is something that moves me passionately," says Antonioni, and he uses paintings over and over again to develop his major theme. Abstractions he treats as the artist's not having taken possession of the thing—they present the same opacity as his own close-ups. Photographs and representational paintings (notably those of the I-was-a-teen-age-nobleman-painter-seducer in *L'Avventura*) signify the artist's having "taken" the thing. At the same time, paintings are themselves objects to be either possessed (as in Riccardo's apartment) or shared, left common, as in the gallery Claudia visits in her free state at the beginning of *L'Avventura* (while, ironically, Sandro is "having" Ana). Water and trains (or planes or boats) are two more images that recur; both seem to signify the passing and flow of experience which cannot be held (the aphrodisiac rainstorm in *La Notte,* for example). Yet both can become containing: the train, obviously; water, when it is held in a rain barrel (*L'Eclisse*), or when people swim in it (*La Notte* and *L'Avventura*).

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There are two ways a dramatic artist can use such images: to reveal and develop the drama inside the events he creates; to reach out to larger themes and issues beyond the particular events. Antonioni, most of the time, chooses the inward route. Necessarily, then, his films tend to lose scope and universality; they lend themselves to being seen only as expressions of *mal de siècle.* Of the three, *La Notte* suffers least from this inward narrowing, perhaps because of the unsubtle sequence in which Lidia (Jeanne Moreau) passes a broken old clock; her weddingbanded hand pulls a big flake of rust off an old iron door. This is a film about mutability, the passing of life and love. Eros and Thanatos are the two great notes sounded at the opening by Tommaso's dying and Giovanni's sudden closing with the nymphomaniac in the hospital. The fact that we cannot hold either life or love is the wall that defines our human limitation and against which we must weep. Valentina (Vitti) is the free spirit, like Piero in the second half of *L'Eclisse*—she can take possession as a game, as can the Negro entertainers, and she seems to teach this truth to Lidia. Not so Giovanni, whose response to the knowledge of death, the passing of love, the fact that even in an open field there are walls, is, *carpe diem,* to tup his wife on the spot. The very knowledge that we cannot have makes us want to.

In *L'Avventura,* Claudia (Vitti) is at first free, uncommitted, unburdened by possessions. The disappearance of Ana (the character who, like Piero in *L'Eclisse,* is always relinquishing) involves Claudia with Sandro. She wants and does not want to repossess her friend. She wants and does not want to have Sandro. He, now, would like to be an architect instead of an estimator; but when he was an architect he wanted the money he could make as an estimator. Knowing he can have Claudia, he runs after the *poule de luxe;* knowing he can have the *poule de luxe,* he runs after Claudia. And in the final gesture, "this mutual sense of pity, which is also a source of strength" (Antonioni), they seem to accept the perilous balance of their lot: they stay together unhappy because they would be unhappy if they gave each other up. If there is one critic who has caught the Antonioni note, it is the Duke in *Measure for Measure:*

> Happy thou art not,
> For what thou hast not, still thou striv'st to get,
> And what thou hast, forget'st.

This dreary thought is the essence of the Antonioni pastoral, for he makes us in the audience go through precisely this business of wanting, not getting, and, if we approach him right, giving up. When I first saw *L'Avventura,* the film bored, annoyed, frustrated, and infuriated me. Inspired by the critics, I tried again. The second time, knowing nothing was going to happen, I made what turns out to be the necessary gesture of surrender to Antonioni: waiting without hope or expec-

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tation. Then I loved the film. Antonioni demands that we adopt the pastoral *otium* he preaches, that we give up the effort to possess, to have. If we ask for a coherence or meaning, he will deny it to us. What he gives us instead are big, long, and cryptic close-ups, a gaggle of objects, a stream of disconnected episodes, an inner life which is an outer life, and an outer life which is an inner life. He gives us a plethora of what we don't seek, and what we do seek, we have to make for ourselves. Antonioni's style and theme are completely one.

But he is being less than honest. We in the audience relinquish, but he, *l'auteur,* does not. One can scarcely imagine a more acquisitive and possessive style than Antonioni's: every detail of the spatial background is caught; in time, his meticulous camera hangs on an actor long after he has passed the crucial moment; the whole film is as obsessively slow and meticulous as an accountant. And perhaps the symptom of this dishonesty is that Antonioni utterly lacks a saving sense of humor.

Further, it seems to me that his technique falls into an old fallacy: he who would shew a bore must yet not bore his audience. In *L'Avventura,* Ana disappears and, not unreasonably, we are curious. What happened? We would like to have an answer, but from Antonioni's point of view, we must learn to give up such expectations of having. Antonioni would show us how we frustrate ourselves by trying to have; it is inartistic of him to do it by making us actually frustrate ourselves.

Antonioni, like Spenser, I respect, admire, approve, and honor, but, unless I am actually seeing a work of his, I do not enjoy. Thinking about it afterwards, I feel bored in retrospect. In Antonioni's case, I think the reason is that he has created a style, not works of art. Quite explicitly, he has given up form:

> I began searching for expressive ways and means [in a documentary, *N.U.*] not so much through an orderly arrangement of shots that would give the scene a clear-cut beginning and end, but more through a juxtaposition of separate isolated shots and sequences that had no immediate connection with one another but which definitely gave more meaning to the idea I had wanted to express.

And yet form, in the classical sense of a beginning, a middle, and an end, is precisely the means by which we possess art, make its experience our own. But this is exactly what Antonioni does not want us to do. Antonioni refuses me my critic's wish to possess, to have his work; so be it. "I say it's spinach, and I say the hell with it."

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HILTON KRAMER

Art Chronicle

"REALISM IS THE GREAT RESOURCE of the innovators at those periods when the schools are becoming languid and turning to mannerism; through it they awaken once more the blasé taste of the public, while the schools turn in the circle of the same conventions. The return to nature is proclaimed, some fine morning, by a man inspired, as he affirms. . . ."

Thus Delacroix, writing in his *Journal* for February 22, 1860, on his encounter with Courbet. M. Etienne Gilson, bringing his philosophic method to bear on Delacroix's remark, commented in *Painting and Reality* (1957):

> If reality is neither a Platonic ideal nor an Aristotelian species, only one way still remains open for the painter as well as for the philosopher. In the schools of the Middle Ages, those who did not believe in the reality of self-subsisting ideas, or in the reality of the species, had no other choice than to identify reality with concrete individuals. This is the very reason the reaction against the conventionalism of the schools and academies regularly assumes the form of a return to realism. The fidelity of the painter to reality as given in actually existing objects or beings is a good cure for the anemia endemic in the abstract types favored by academic painting. Within the limits of imitational art, no other kind of reaction seems to be conceivable. Beauty has to be found where it is, and if concrete individuals are the only true realities, then the painter has to find beauty in them, taken as they are, or he will never find it. The solid realism of Courbet, not always pure of vulgarity, well exemplifies the normal reaction of a born artist against the mannerism of the schools.

Delacroix's observation, together with M. Gilson's commentary, sums up with amazing aptness the predicament of painting at the present time. A hundred years after Courbet's revolutionary assault on Romantic conventions, painters find themselves similarly confronted with "the mannerism of the schools," but now it is the mannerism of schools in which the most forward-looking movements and innovations of an entire century—the century of modern art—have triumphed and congealed. Many painters today are thus in the difficult position of aspiring to artistic innovation while remaining acutely conscious of the fact that the very idea of innovation has become an academic commonplace. They feel the need of a basic revolt against the conventions of modern art, and yet recognize the need itself as one of the

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conventions they would most like to destroy. This recognition does nothing, however, to abate the actual momentum of revolt; at most it contributes an element of paradox to an already contradictory impulse. It is a way of acknowledging the limits that will necessarily obtain in any current effort to break with the established values of modernism. As in political revolution, the peculiar nature of the *ancien régime* defines and circumscribes the character of all attempts to destroy it, and becomes itself a decisive element in the dialectic of change.

A revolt of some kind—in fact, of several kinds—is now evident in many quarters that formerly looked like safe districts from the point of view of entrenched modernism. True to Delacroix's insight, it takes for the most part the form of that "return to nature" which, in some sense, remains the fundamental resource in the artist's struggle against the schools. But in precisely *what* sense does "nature" make its reappearance in these new developments? This is perhaps the most difficult and slippery question facing the critic who undertakes to grasp what is really going on in the widespread reaction against abstract painting generally and Abstract Expressionist painting in particular. For "nature" now has some meanings that are entirely new, at least so far as artists are concerned, and its reappearance in painting takes more disparate forms than the old precepts of Realist aesthetics could have foreseen.

Roger Fry said that "Courbet approached landscape with all the intimate knowledge of trees and wild animals of a born countryman and sportsman," but of what do painters today have a similar "intimate knowledge"? The answer to this question is, alas, a further paradox, for the only world that painters now seem to know with any intimacy at all is the world of—painting! Painting has become, even for an artist in revolt against the schools, what Frank Kermode, in speaking of Valéry's concept of poetry, has called a "second nature"—"the universe of modern art"—which is parallel to but independent of actual nature. And "of this other [second] nature," writes Mr. Kermode, "criticism is perhaps the physics," with the result, one might add, that a "return to nature" on the part of painters so radically circumscribed in their affective allegiances takes the sole form of a critical analysis of existing artistic materials and devices in an effort to uncover what can truly be considered "real" in the making of art.[1] The universe of modern art is explored as if it really were a universe in the physicist's sense, and "Realism" comes to mean only the articulation of those optical or structural elements which, because of painting's impure involvement with actual nature in the past, have never been fully able to reveal themselves as the basic—the only real—fabric of this "second nature."

[1] The criticism of Clement Greenberg, for example, is precisely a "physics" of this kind, confining itself almost exclusively to the structural morphology of painting as a "second nature" in which expressive and representational functions have at best an epiphenomenal status.

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Painting thus burrows ever more deeply and exclusively into itself in its quest to discover what, in fact, it *really* is.

This is not what most of us mean by "Realism," nor what most painters who currently regard their work as existing in one or another relation to the Realist tradition—the tradition of Courbet—mean by it, and yet an awareness of realism in this sense, the structural and optical realism of painting wholly enclosed in the concerns of "second nature," is essential to an understanding of what the new Realists (if one may call them that) are attempting at the present moment. For every one of the latter group has grown up, artistically, within the purlieus of abstract art, and has been more deeply affected as a man and more intimately absorbed as an artist in the "second nature" of modern art than in nature itself. As a consequence, every artistic foray into observed visual experience for the purposes of pictorial representation comes up hard against the familiar certainties of "second nature" as an obstacle to any new use of actual nature as a visual resource.

Consider Richard Diebenkorn, the San Francisco artist who is undoubtedly the most celebrated figure painter to have emerged in this country in the last five years. The special quality of his large and ambitious pictures, whether they depict interiors or outdoor scenes, consists in the articulation of a highly generalized spatial vista of great amplitude and warmth. The basic image is of an open, radiant California landscape (even his interiors look like landscapes) very cannily transmuted into a tight pictorial structure and painted with a "free," fast, heavily-loaded brush that relieves (or perhaps only disguises) an unrelaxed formal rigor with an air of spontaneity and improvisation. Often these pictures have figures in them—and indeed, Diebenkorn's current fame is directly connected with "the figure"—but these figures serve only as formal counters, inflecting the space they occupy but imposing nothing of their existential presence on the scene depicted. They are, characteristically, figures with heads but without faces. Only as much of their reality as can be made to satisfy the needs of "second nature" is admitted; their existence in actual nature is deftly circumvented. And in fact, the landscape too is without a face; it has form but no physiognomy. It has no reality other than a spatial reality, which is all that abstract art requires of it. One is reminded that Diebenkorn's basic format and painterly method were both fairly well perfected in his Abstract Expressionist painting before he turned to landscape and figures, and neither has been significantly modified by his ostensible involvement with a new subject-matter. "The fidelity of the painter to reality as given in actually existing objects or beings," which M. Gilson correctly regards as a crucial resource in the artist's struggle with received forms, has been denied a decisive expressive role in the making of the painting. The representational element, such as it is, has become at best one of the several disguises the painting wears to

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satisfy the vicissitudes of taste, but it is not really integral to the basic conception.

Where, then, does this leave us in relation to "the mannerism of the schools"? Diebenkorn is a painter of enormous gifts and immense sophistication, but his style, grand as it may be in many respects, represents, I think, a kind of counterfeit of the very change it attempts to effect. It remains a coefficient of the mannerism that its superficial innovations are helpless to modify in any fundamental way, with the result that the artist—no doubt unintentionally—has only succeeded in turning "the figure" into another satellite of abstract art. (This is surely one reason for his great success; far from awakening, or jolting, "the blasé taste of the public," this style has a very tranquillizing effect.) Fry said of Courbet: "His love of the facts did not obscure his feeling for their relations"; but of Diebenkorn one may say that his love—and mastery—of "relations" *does* obscure his feeling for, his essential conviction about, the observed facts.

The particular kind of accommodation that Diebenkorn has effected between nature and abstract art has established him as a *chef d'école* on the West Coast. His influence is observable in practically every group show of Bay Area painters one sees and in many of the large national exhibitions that take place around the country. But I find it hard to believe that his work can represent anything but a transition, for himself no less than for those who have fallen under his sway, and my conviction on this score has lately been re-enforced by a glance at some new paintings by another San Francisco artist, James Weeks, who will be showing at the Poindexter Gallery in New York this spring. Weeks's last show, a couple of years ago, revealed him to be a strong painter who, though enthralled by Diebenkorn's peculiar compromise, was nonetheless more concerned than many of his fellow Californians to establish the concrete presence of particular scenes and personalities in his pictures. His new work locates him at a greater distance from Diebenkorn's ideas, and it is enormously interesting to see in what quarter he has sought a countervailing influence that would liberate his painting, to a degree, from the exactions of "second nature" and put it in closer proximity to the direct experience of his senses. It is to the American classics, Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins, that Weeks has turned for support, and he has succeeded in drawing from them a sense of immediacy in the relation of subject to method that permits him to circumvent some of the clichés of modern art, particularly as they have been expounded in San Francisco.

It may be that Homer and Eakins, and perhaps others among the great figures of nineteenth-century American painting, are now to be revived by painters searching for a viable alternative to art conceived as a "second nature," for what has always been regarded as the principal flaw and limitation of these artists—their relative isolation from, and indifference to, the development of modern painting in Europe—

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may now be looked upon as a source of liberation from the tyranny of forms that no longer have an immediate relevance to life. Whatever their limitations may be in other respects, the works of Homer and Eakins embody a conviction about the relation of art to observed experience that cannot help but seem a miracle of confidence and vitality to artists making their first hesitant steps toward a similar rapprochement. I suspect that a good many American classics, long regarded with friendly condescension by artists who considered themselves superior in worldly culture, are now to be looked at with a new clarity and respect.

Another painter who has been looking at Eakins, but whose principal prototype seems to be an artist like Mantegna, is Philip Pearlstein, who is showing paintings and drawings from the last two years at the Frumkin Gallery in New York this spring. Pearlstein is one of the most interesting and least appreciated artists in the current scene, and it remains a question whether his new exhibition will not alienate still further whatever small following he has been able to retain through the difficult course of his recent development. Practically alone among painters in New York, he has been willing to ask the difficult questions raised by the new interest in Realism, and he has been willing, moreover, to risk the one thing that others have carefully shied away from in exploring new possibilities—a complete break with current, "modern" taste. There are painters of the figure—Manoucher Yektai and Ben Johnson, particularly—who are far more dazzling and virtuosic in performance and infinitely more compelling psychologically, but none has gone as far as Pearlstein in attempting to establish a new basis for Realism completely outside the canon of modernist style.

Like the others, however, Pearlstein was once himself an abstract painter of a sort. Some years ago, when he was working very much out of Soutine, he was selected by Clement Greenberg as a "New Talent." But in the interim he has moved further and further away from Expressionist practice, banishing all psychological overtones from his work and perfecting instead a hard, sculptural precision as his main expressive instrument. For years he confined himself to landscape themes, particularly rocks and mountains, and on a visit to Italy several years ago he produced a series of drawings of ruins and hillsides that are among the masterpieces of graphic art in this century. It is only in the last two years that he has turned to a serious revaluation of figure painting, and thus to the central issue confronting the Realist revival.

Pearlstein is a great draftsman who has never, I think, been able to transfer to the painting medium all the power and precision of his drawings, but his new figure paintings come closer to effecting the right synthesis of graphic and painterly elements than anything in his earlier work. Drawing directly from the nude model—and stead-

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fastly refusing to turn either the drawings or the finished paintings into anything but scrupulous and aloof renderings of models posing (there is no effort to hint, even indirectly, at a dramatic or psychological episode)—Pearlstein really does address himself to "concrete individuals [as] the only true realities" in a way that is practically unique in modern times. The result is an art that is cold, detached, tough-minded to an incredible degree, and yet exhilarating in its honesty and concreteness. Here "second nature" has been triumphantly by-passed for a new look at the *real* thing.

The drawings, of course, are still superior to the paintings, for Pearlstein has not yet solved the problem that has plagued painters of the figure through the ages: establishing a truly meaningful relation between the figure—in Pearlstein's case, this nude model right here before me—and the space that encloses the figure. He avoids the spatial clichés of abstract art, but has yet to create a compelling alternative. Delacroix, writing on Courbet, identified this "harmony between the accessories and the principal object" as "a thing lacking in the majority of [even] great painters," and he quickly perceived that Courbet, too, often had great difficulty making a proper and significant connection between his figures and their surroundings. In all the current activity connected with Realism, the "return to nature," the revival of the figure, and so on, Pearlstein alone has emulated Courbet in going back to the very beginning of the problem and attempting to reconstruct the *real*—and thus painting—from its existential sources.

B. H. HAGGIN

Music and Ballet Chronicle

WAGNER'S *Die Meistersinger,* his only comedy, is the one work of his concerned with characters who are, behave like, and are involved in the situations of, real human beings—with the exception of Beckmesser, who introduces into all this reality the jarring incongruity of the unreal in the form of the distortions and the low-comedy antics of a caricature. And though the writing which the play elicits from Wagner is characteristically long-winded, it is uncharacteristically genial and sunny—which is to say that the garrulous outpouring gives us some of his most engaging and most affecting music—passages as lovely as the opening of the third-act duet of Sachs and Eva, and as moving as the orchestral prelude of that act.

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The Metropolitan's new production of the work presented an additional incongruity—between Robert O'Hearn's beautifully imagined realistic sets for the first three scenes, and the modern-style assemblage of platforms and ramps (with a backdrop offering an aerial view of a Valhalla-like Nürnberg) that necessitated changes in the stage action of the last scene which made it less effective. Except for this scene Nathaniel Merrill's staging was good; and the principals—Otto Wiener as Sachs, Sandor Konya as Walther, Ingrid Bjoner as Eva, Karl Dönch as Beckmesser, Ernst Wiemann as Pogner, Murray Dickie as David—acted their parts well. But only Konya exhibited a first-class voice in a distinguished vocal performance. The cast was not, then, what one would expect in a new Metropolitan production; but there was pleasure in hearing the beautiful music sung and played with the precision of an early performance of a new production with the original cast as yet unchanged.

Concerning the Metropolitan's *Don Giovanni* Paul Henry Lang wrote that Lorin Maazel lacked the sine qua non of operatic conducting—the ability to "take in both stage and pit at one glance and . . . make up his mind . . . which of the two should be favored in a given situation. As a result neither the singers nor the orchestra received adequate guidance . . . and there was plenty of inaccuracy directly attributable to the conductor's ambiguous—and late—cues. But above all, Mr. Maazel's tempos were lamentably wrong—every allegro was whipped to a presto. . . ." I hadn't heard this first performance; but at the dress rehearsal I had found Maazel's operation with singers and orchestra to be assured and efficient and his pacing of the work to be flawless. Moreover, I had heard Maazel's precise and finished performance of Mendelssohn's *Italian* Symphony with the Orchestre National Français, about which Lang had written that "the violins could not take the fast figurations cleanly" and "there was some stumbling and slurring"; and I was therefore inclined to doubt that he was any more accurate about the *Don Giovanni*. But then a friend with two of the sharpest ears I know heard the next *Don Giovanni* and said that as an operatic performance it was the most ragged he had ever heard, not only as between singers and orchestra but as between different parts of the orchestra. This led me to question a musician at the Metropolitan, who made everything very clear. Maazel, he said, was unquestionably a greatly gifted conductor, but one who was not yet completely integrated and matured, who operated on the inspiration of the moment, and who therefore wasn't always consistent from one performance to the next. In addition, his approach to opera was still that of a symphonic conductor—one who held the singers to his beat as he did the orchestra, instead of establishing a rapport with them in which he adapted himself to their needs of the moment; and this produced the occasional raggedness as between singers and orchestra. And since players in an opera orchestra come to have one ear on the singing, it

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sometimes happened that part of the orchestra followed the singer while the other part followed Maazel—which produced the occasional raggedness within the orchestra. But all this, my informant said, had been exaggerated in the press; and he repeated that Maazel was a greatly gifted conductor, adding that in a few years he should be one of the best.

The program of the Concert Opera Association's performance of Spontini's *La Vestale*—the first in New York since the Metropolitan production of 1925-27—had an interview with the Association's conductor, Thomas Scherman, in which he contended that concert performance of opera "provides a near-ideal forum for comprehension of a work's text and essential musical construction minus the usual distractions" of stage performance, and that it was appropriate for works in which "musical values take precedence over visual ones" and "literal scenery, costumes and histrionics are not a prime factor for over-all success." In his opinion *La Vestale* was such a work; and the one bit of it that I knew—the beautiful aria *"Tu che invoco"* recorded by Ponselle—led me to expect to hear his opinion confirmed by the performance. It turned out to be a poor performance—with extremely unpleasant-sounding singing by Régine Crespin and unimpressive singing by the others, and a shapeless orchestral context—which the acoustic peculiarities of Philharmonic Hall made even worse. Nevertheless it provided a "forum for comprehension" which revealed that the work's musical values were limited to *"Tu che invoco"*—*"Toi que j'implore"* in this performance—and the aria *"Toi que je laisse,"* and that it needed all the help that spectacular stage production could give it.

Curious about Thomas Dunn's conducting, I attended his performance of Haydn's *The Seasons* with the Cantata Singers, and found his dealing with the score, the orchestra and the chorus to be technically efficient and musically very satisfying. Adele Addison contributed her exquisitely delicate singing; but to my ear the tenor George Shirley's voice was unattractive and his phrasing undistinguished; and John Reardon's baritone showed a loss of some of its former beauty. Moreover, I found this time that the work itself carried its charming innocence—relieved only by the few powerful moments in the Winter section—to a length which made it tedious.

Balanchine's *La Valse* was revived by the New York City Ballet at the end of its season last May. The music—Ravel's *Valses Nobles et Sentimentales* and *La Valse*—is slick trash, which stimulated Balanchine's powers as a theater artist to produce what is mostly a chic theater piece. Originally there were in addition the gifts of Tanaquil LeClercq to stimulate him to produce the slow dance to the eighth waltz, which those gifts made powerful and unforgettable: I still retain the images of her tall figure in its quiet but electrifying entrance and the tremendous lifts of her exit. Patricia McBride is a lovely

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dancer, but without the powers of presence and projection to give the dance the effect LeClercq gave it. Nor was she an adequate replacement for LeClercq in the dance of death with Moncion later on.

The company's European tour deprived the New York public of the winter season; but there were the usual Christmas performances of *The Nutcracker.* What basis of information Allen Hughes of *The Times* has for his statement that the New York City Ballet's *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker* don't reflect the interest and the true genius of Balanchine, I don't know: *I* remember Balanchine's speaking with great warmth about his desire to put on *The Nutcracker;* and what he produced was a superb achievement of all his powers: in the first act chiefly his powers as theater artist, which give us the beautifully imagined detail of the Christmas party and Clara's dream, so touching in the feeling for a child's world, a child's imagination, that is to be heard also in Tchaikovsky's music; in the second act his powers as choreographer, which give us some of his finest invention in the intricately contrapuntal dance of the Marzipan Shepherdesses, the dance of Dewdrop and the Flowers, and the climactic grand pas de deux of the Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier, with the freshly imagined details of the quiet beginning of the supported adagio before the crescendo of impassioned brilliance, and her solo, with the stepping across the meter of the music that is at once so casual and so exciting. Moreover, he has continued to work on it—each year bringing changes of detail. This year's change—to have the curtain rise during the marvelous orchestral introduction to Act 2 and reveal the Angels on the half-lighted stage—worked well. But an earlier change I continue to regret: the removal of the Fairy's solo from the pas de deux to the beginning of the act, which necessitates the omission also of the Cavalier's solo, and reduces the pas de deux to the opening supported adagio and the coda.

In the first performance Melissa Hayden danced the Fairy efficiently; in later performances Allegra Kent danced it with her exquisite fluidity, and Violette Verdy with her stylistic elegance and verve. Jacques d'Amboise was an excellent partner, but exhibited less than his usual brilliance in his leaps and turns; Jillana and McBride were lovely Dewdrops. And everyone else did well except Deni Lamont, who doesn't have the dazzling speed and brilliance that Robert Barnett originally contributed to Candy Canes, and Kent Stowell, who is even less adequate in it.

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AIMÉ PATRI

Paris Letter

NEWS FROM FRANCE CALLS, first of all, for a commentary on the current political situation which may be a thing of the past when this letter is published. No matter, if it is true that this dear old country is politically the most conservative in the world. Even revolution is a tradition here, while the adherents of a yet older tradition never fail to make themselves felt; thus our friends need not be much perturbed by the "change" that once more has come to pass.

The classic land of revolutions, situated at the heart of Europe, trembles but does not break. Seeking a point of equilibrium which doubtless it is not in the nature of things to attain conclusively, she oscillates—since 1789 at least—between the poles of Anarchy and Caesarism. After the Restoration cut off by the July Revolt and followed by the Second Empire on the morrow of the episode of '48, the longest period of institutional stability was the Third Republic (1875–1940). But as the author of *Temps des Cerises,* the charming J. B. Clément, sang, "she loved the military overmuch," our Marianne with the red bonnet. After the uncle who went down at Waterloo, she got a crush on the nephew who ended at Sedan. During the period of her ostensible good behavior, a general with a black horse who was reputed to be as good as a loaf of white bread owed his failure only to his clumsiness, but after the misfortune of 1940, she donned an old Marshal's cap. Thus De Gaulle enters into a long and glorious lineage. They compare him also to Louis XIV, Louis XI and Philip the Fair, which does not make us any younger. At the moment he has the advantage over Louis-Napoleon of being his own ancestor, since he is the same man who, on June 18, 1940, foretold the allied victory and so founded his personal legitimacy. Made strong by popular assent, he is truly the "Emperor of the Republic," the title given his more glorious predecessor which can be found on certain coins.

Is additional proof needed of what we are suggesting with regard to our revolutionary traditionalism? It can be found in the surprising get-up of the French Communist Party. It is a still lively old body, even though afflicted—like its head, the valiant Maurice Thorez, who bears the title "Son of the People,"—with one or more crises. There is not the like of it in all of this little Europe, where, except in Italy, its equivalents have been reduced to the most elementary terms. But, while, on the other side of the Alps, the wily Togliatti has outfitted himself according to the latest Khrushchevian fashions, our Son of the People stoutly holds on to his old Stalinite garb. For all that, he avoids a Chinese or Albanian scandal, because he is a serious person, a worthy

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worker raised by his own resources to the ranks of officialdom. This Son-Father, habitually docile to orders which come to him from Above, rules over a flock of decent reformers who none the less remain the authentic descendants of the Commune, of Sans-culottism, and of the oldest Jacqueries: "The unvanquished Commune will not admit defeat," the song still runs. Commonsensical reform, to be sure: nothing in his daily behavior actually distinguishes a syndicated member of the French archaic-Stalinite C.G.T. from his comrades in the free trade unions of Belgium, Germany, or Luxemburg. Let, however, Election Day approach, and the traditional revolutionary spirit affirms itself: unconditional faithfulness to the Party, whatever it commands.

One would be grievously mistaken to believe that there is in France a moral and ideological gulf between the Communist and the simple Republican. Let the Republic be declared by both parties to be in danger, and they will always find a way to meet. In a country as conservative, hence as provincial and "isolationist" as ours, good as it always is at giving lessons to the world, it is considerations of internal politics that carry the day. It is the prize anti-Communist Guy Mollet who, beyond all divergences in interior politics, took the initiative to offer an electoral junket to his neighborly enemy Thorez. They had a little friendly drink together. The election results, compared to those of the previous legislature, were profitable for both parties concerned.

There are still regions of France where one knows only the Blues and the Whites: the Blues were the soldiers of the First Republic who fought the Royalist Insurgents. The Reds came later on, despite the protest of Lamartine, who, in 1848, did not wish such a distinction to be made. Let us make use of it, however, to compose our tricolor flag, according to current parliamentary proportions. Whether or not the Reds are some kind of Blues with slightly empurpled faces, this flag, marked with the sign of Joan of Arc, consists of much more white than red or blue. One is tempted to wonder whether the shepherdess from Domrémy was not, as Shakespeare suggested, a young lady with royal blood, rather than a peasant's daughter. The Whites are also what, in another vocabulary, is known in France as "the right." But let us make clear just what is today this Right, still white without being lily-white,[1] or lily-white as yet, but with a brisure of bastardy as on the personal banner of the Maid of Lorraine which comprised only two fleurs-de-lis instead of three. Let us beware above all of confusing this Right with the Extreme Right, whose leader Salan lies in the jail of Roy. Between the Right and the Extreme Right there are at least as many differences as between Guy Mollet and Maurice Thorez when they stand, as often happens, after having electorally drunk together, with knives drawn at each other. According to the symmetry of the respective positions, as many differences, but perhaps not more; because, as we also know, they can be reconciled.

[1] A reference to the fleur-de-lis of the royal coat-of-arms [*Trans.*].

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Without using this vocabulary, indeed repudiating it, the Head of State, in one of his broadcast addresses, has admirably posited the problem which falls in the area of "principles" rather than in that of programs. The National Hero maintained that, in fact, it was his privilege to "make the politics" while his adversaries claimed to continue to "make politics" as if nothing were amiss. This subtle grammatical distinction, by virtue of a mere definite article, sheds light on the debate of the Referendum and then the elections, inasmuch as, contrary to expectation, the legislative elections proved the logical consequence of the Referendum: two concepts of the State opposed each other.

Let us, at least for the sake of argument, call "Right" or, if you prefer, "Moderate Right" to distinguish it from the Extreme Right, the aggregate of people who admit that it is indeed a crime to "make politics,"—which does not prevent them, in the long run, from voting, and voting even massively: they are the immaculate Whites, not necessarily lilified, but finally softened by an Eagle cruising on high. They feel that, truly, it behooves the Chief to "make the politics" and that his principal mission is to make it possible for them to stroll peacefully to their private affairs (which may make for a misunderstanding between the Protector and the protected). The Right does not always have an Eagle, but it constantly watches for his coming and is always willing to give up for his sake the more modest worthies to whom it has treated itself for lack of something better. In any case, when it has got one, be he as he may, it wants to keep him. Such a beautiful Bird!

The people on the right are not always the same but there always is a Right. The strength of the Right varies according to the press of circumstances and also the Eagle's tactical skill: to what extent he can, at a given moment, manipulate subtle line-ups, for what counts is not brute numbers but cohesiveness. Considering the state of affairs, the Right, as long as it refrains from extremism or fury, remains guided by the conviction that "things are not so bad as all that" and that, in any case, "it could be worse" if one were rash enough to make changes. He who was on the Left, under certain conditions, veers to the Right. Thus, as the saying is, do proletarians become middle-class. But everything cannot be reduced to social differentiation. The Moderantism which swept away all the obstacles the Eagle complained of coming upon in his course, brings together workers and peasants as well as tradesmen, bankers, and small, middle and big business. A sensible Marxist analysis (by which is meant one that takes into account first of all economic dynamics instead of sticking to the static position of class warfare) would connect the electoral success of the U.N.R. with the favorable economic condition. This triumphant Right, examined at its source, is the friend of peace and quiet. Are its aspirations ultimately compatible with the politics of loftiness or Grandeur that the Eagle favors? That is another question.

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Now let us consider the Left or the Blues who have been beaten. This is an agglomerate of people who hold that it is everyone's duty to "make politics" in order to prevent the Chief, or chiefs, from having too easy a time of it; the camp of "grumpiness, grumbles, and grudge," according to the powerful words of General De Gaulle. Whatever the tenor of the times, was not a house divided against itself slated for defeat? Only in the Communist Party is there any discipline, but one doubts that this is quite the Blue Left: in the traditionally blue parties, even if red-tinted, the main occupation of the militants is to harass the chiefs and assistant chiefs, to organize schisms under the pretext of regrouping: the Unified Socialist Party is the fruit of a split from the S.F.I.O. An astute leader like Pierre Mendès-France, when he tries to make use of this predisposition in order to tumble the other leaders, succeeds only in causing the collapse of the house (the Radical-Socialist Party since then patched up as nearly as possible) and to get himself eliminated from Parliament twice consecutively. The M.R.P., a new party sprung up at the Liberation, and the one which De Gaulle (before the R.P.F. and the U.N.R.) had thought of making his own, is blue with a white tint, inviting left-wing Catholics and the faithful of the Right Center. The question of subsidies to free schools (denominational), separates them from other blue parties and brings them closer to the Independents, the *ci-devants* from the right of the preceding legislature who saw their effective forces melt like butter in the sun to the advantage of the U.N.R. These *ci-devant* Rightists, maddened by the gesture of the Chief snapping his fingers at Parliament, formed a coalition with the Left recommending "no" for an answer to the Referendum. The voters, faithful to the principle of the Chief, have punished them. And yet this heteroclite Left fought well and, vigorously propped up by the Communists re-dyed blue, gave evidence of its resistance and liveliness, especially south of the Loire. No more than the U.N.R. now consists of bigwigs who were not numerous enough, does the Left consist exclusively of little people, which does not explain its remaining in the minority. Can one speak of a Left made up of notables? In a sense, yes, even if this should appear jocose. Local, departmental, and national office-holders indignant at the little heed paid by the sole Chief to the prerogatives attached to their functions; jurists scandalized by the rape of the Constitution, the special tribunals and administrative internments; union leaders conscious of their responsibilities and resolved not to abdicate them in favor of Power; teachers excited by the disastrous neglect of public schools and always ready to do battle for principles; military men tired of being duped and having their ears blasted off—voted "no" for the most part. I have just evoked the military from whose ranks were recruited yesterday the firecracker-tossers and assassination-bunglers! It must be admitted then that there was a bit of the Right and even of the Extreme Right in this Left. But political geography re-

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volves, and a designation does not fasten immutably onto a given person or group. I uphold the criterion whereby anyone who at a given moment "makes politics" in contempt of the Chief's principle is a Leftist, at least circumstantially. One will want to know whether such a Left will not be called to form a large part of the resistance rather than of the movement. We shall come back to this question.

The salient fact concerning these elections and this Referendum is that, on both sides, the fight was for principles and not for programs. As for a program, the General, who does not care to divulge his secrets, had none to confide to his partisans: his name sufficed. He could have had, if the fancy had taken him, his bedroom-slipper elected, provided it bore the trademark (which did not prevent the defeat of his trusty steed Michel Debré, paying for everything that went wrong during the previous legislature). The non-Communist opposition had indeed attempted to formulate a common program on the eve of the Referendum. But these old parties went into combat in scattered ranks, at least in the first round of the elections, and this program was not supported before the voters. Let us recall that these parties of the center maintained that nothing separated them in matters of foreign policy and that, on the contrary, everything on this plane set them apart as much from the General as from the Communists: they were for the Atlantic Treaty without any particularist fissure, and for a Federated Europe not reduced to a coalition of states such as the General supports. On the other hand, the exclusion of a purely national striking force brings them nearer the Communists, but for different reasons. Lastly, in internal affairs, they swore to agree to resolve the vexed question of the schools, an old bone of contention always apt to arouse clerical and anticlerical passions. It might be noted in this context that in the regions where she disposes of a traditional influence, on promise of continuation and increase of subsidies to the free schools, the Catholic church most likely got votes for the General. From this common program, which was not simply an occasional one, seeing that it was not used on the occasion, one can foresee roughly what the line of non-Communist parliamentary opposition will be, but that of the governmental majority remains the General's secret. One is thus reduced to conjectures on the question of what tomorrow will be like. In foreign and military policy, one knows that De Gaulle clings passionately to his striking force which is supposed to permit him to arbitrate the East-West conflict, a grandiose and probably Utopian objective, which leaves one by no means unaware that its attempted realization by the proposed means will be extremely costly. This does not keep him, in internal affairs, from nurturing, like his predecessor Louis-Napoleon, the project of proceeding toward the "extinction of pauperism" and so play a trick on the Communists of the interior. Lastly, according to certain rumors and confidences, he seems to be thinking of retiring in 1965 and designating his succes-

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sor, which sheds light on certain undersides of the Referendum having to do with the election of the President of the Republic by direct universal suffrage. They attribute to him also the intention of putting an end to the opposition of large bodies which have been hostile to him, such as the Senate or the Council of State, by abolishing or transforming them.

The other salient fact is the extraordinary repression by the French electoral body of the Algerian question now considered as resolved. Under the previous legislature one could assume that it was on this issue that one could separate the Right from the Left. But actually, in metropolitan France, it was only a matter of an Extreme Right and an extreme Left (often non-Communist) that were particularly vociferous, while the main part of the country remained, since the start of the crisis in 1954, passive, undecided, the prey of pangs of conscience but ardently demanding a solution whatever it might be. It is by this moral situation that the General profited to come back into power in 1958, carefully hiding his intentions, to the extent that he had any definite ones, and allowing hope to subsist in the hearts of the partisans of either solution, and, above all, in those of the large masses content merely to wish for one. At that point, almost everyone in France was on the "right," in the sense in which I have defined the appropriate political reflexes. But as the solution that came about entailed an option, the General had a pretty good idea that the parties which had called him in somewhat like the Roman dictator to solve a problem from which they saw no way out, would want to reduce his powers to the relevant constitutional portion. Engaging in a kind of preventive political warfare, he defied, then defeated them; but with the same stroke he also reawakened the ancient opposition of the Right and the Left, and put back into the saddle the Communists, removed since 1947, in the wake of his first abandonment of power, from all efficacious participation in French political life.

One of the main reasons for General de Gaulle's success in France and for his prestige with our friends abroad lies in the bad taste left by the governmental instability of the preceding republics. Historical fair play ordains that nothing be exaggerated. The Third Republic permitted France, as already noted, to enjoy constitutional stability in the absence of governmental stability. The régime which crumbled at the beginning of the Second World War, victoriously got through the First. The Fourth Republic, dimmer and shorter, can nonetheless present to its credit the eviction of the Communists dangerously ensconced in power after the Liberation, the Atlantic Treaty, the Common Market, a rhythm of economic growth which bears comparison with countries of similar standing, despite difficulties which were only superficial, as was shown after the event by the Pinay reform, a repeat of the Poincaré experience of 1926. Under both régimes, the instability of the ministry itself was often more apparent than real, because,

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in the last analysis, it was the same men who kept cropping up with variable functions, while the administration, pursuing its task, assured without clashes the daily life of the nation, "crises" notwithstanding. But such a régime was not destined to resolve the problems for the national conscience stemming from the Algerian affair, just as the Third Republic was not made to shoulder the armistice of 1940. This was De Gaulle's second chance and history will tell what he will make of it.

In a future letter, I shall address myself to the intellectual, literary, and artistic actuality which political contingencies have made me neglect for the nonce.

P.S. January 30, 1963—The break which has just taken place in Brussels can be compared only to the finishing off of the C.E.D. (European Defense Community), a French proposal which was rejected by France in its official capacity in 1954. But it was then the act of a joint parliamentary majority (Communists and Gaullists in coalition with the most backward conservatives). The new break is the deed of one man alone, to whom the nation has imprudently given a blank check against the advice of those whose sight was clearer. It can be said that excepting the chief of state, not a single Frenchman wanted it—since even the U.N.R. delegates to the European assembly at Strassburg had voted in favor of Great Britain's entry into the Common Market. The break of 1954 had grave consequences. It is justified to assume that, had the contrary possibility been implemented, national as well as international events would have taken a different course. May the break of 1963 not prove even more costly to this country and the world! But long live the Western Republic, all the same!

[*Translated by John Simon*]

Notes on Contributors *(cont.)*

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An edition of Giovanni Battista Gelli's *Circe*, edited by ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS, has just been published by Cornell University Press.

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Reviews

SIDNEY MONAS

Ehrenburg's Life, Solzhenitsyn's Day[1]

To call a writer clever at journalism is not to praise him. For Ilya Ehrenburg, until recently, there were few even among his admirers who would have claimed much more than that. Yet at the age of seventy he began to write a most extraordinary book of memoirs, the first two installments of which have recently appeared in English under the title *People and Life, 1891-1921*.

Russian intellectual history seems to consist of autobiographies rather than ideas—of men explaining their ideas in terms of their life-experience. The ideas tend to seem secondary to the circumstances in which they came to be believed, as the broken mast to which a drowning man clings comes in retrospect to seem secondary to the experience of shipwreck. Reminiscence has brought out the best in such different Russian writers as Serge Aksakov, Alexander Herzen, Annenkov, Apollon Grigoriev, Kropotkin, Maxim Gorky and many others. An unusual number of otherwise quite unliterary figures have risen to a certain simple and impressive eloquence of style in their memoirs and autobiographical fragments. Even that great, rude, crude radical of the 1860's, Chernyshevsky, who all but prided himself on the barbarities of his public style, is vivid and moving and (in the good sense) poetic when he describes the Volga town of Saratov where he grew up and where his father was an Orthodox priest. Of Gorky's work, so much admired in its day, almost all that remains alive are his reminiscences and his *Childhood*.

What Russian, indeed, is not eloquent speaking directly of his own experience? Nature and history, mass misery and individual consciousness, tension and inertia, art and society, grappling and intertwined in a great dialectic, seem to crowd in upon and magnify the act of reminiscence.

[1] PEOPLE AND LIFE, 1891-1921, by *Ilya Ehrenburg*. Trans. by *Anna Bostock* and *Yvonne Kapp*. Knopf. $5.95. A CHANGE OF SEASON, by *Ilya Ehrenburg*. Consisting of THE THAW, trans. by *Manya Harari*, and THE SPRING, trans. by *Humphrey Higgins*. Knopf. $4.50. VOICES IN THE SNOW, by *Olga Carlisle*. Random House. $4.95. DISSONANT VOICES IN SOVIET LITERATURE, edited by *Patricia Blake* and *Max Hayward*. Pantheon. $5.95. ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH, by *Alexander Solzhenitsyn*. Two translations are available: one by *Max Hayward* and *Ronald Hingley* (Praeger, $3.95); the other by *Ralph Parker* (Dutton, $3.95).

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Ehrenburg is not simple; and his memoirs are not personal. They are not, though in the beginning he claims they are, "a confession," but rather an apology, a plea, and a course of instruction. They are didactic (that, too, is a Russian tradition) and they are dramatic.

I have, like many others, admired and approved of Ehrenburg's role in the culture-politics of post-Stalinist Russia. He has favored tolerance, breadth, freedom, and the young. He has written good essays on Chekhov and Stendhal, opposed attempts to enforce "popularity" on the arts, sniped away determinedly at the ragged remnants of the doctrine of "socialist realism," and he has spoken out against political interference in literature and painting. With the angels, to be sure. Some doubt as to sincerity or depth of commitment might, of course, in view of his past record, still linger.

As a writer, he was always cold and clever. His two cleverest novels were written during his "nihilist" phase, his second stay in France. *Julio Jurenito* (the full title takes up an entire page), published in 1921, and compared by some French critics to *Candide,* is against art, against tradition, against ideologies. It is somewhat in the spirit of Ezra Pound and Wyndham Lewis in their *Blast!* phase. ("Blast art! blast culture! blast everything!") Jurenito and his disciples romp among the moral ruins. Lenin's Russia is not spared. Nothing is spared. Yet the situations are more fanciful than imaginative, the characters are stereotypes, and the irony is gross. As a period-piece it is interesting; as a novel, dull.

The Stormy Life of Lasik Roytschwantz takes the same gallows-humor excursion through Russia and Europe. Roytschwantz, who knows better, tries to do what others do in order to survive. He means no one harm, yet he becomes everybody's victim. He is almost a Yiddish Good Soldier Schweik, except that (since Schweik is thick-skinned and unknowing) this is a contradiction in terms. Unfortunately, Ehrenburg's easy skepticism is never far removed from sentimentality. Coldness and skepticism and sentimentality, in these early days, are the forms assumed by his troubled lack of commitment. He tries, but he cannot quite manage to like even Roytschwantz. So—"Blast!"

In a poem dedicated to Ehrenburg (translated by Olga Carlisle and included in her book) Marina Tsvetaeva described him:

> Caught between sky and palate,
> Ehrenburg, doubter, rejoice!

As to his work after *Roytschwantz,* however, and up to 1954, there seems little in it to cause Ehrenburg (always fastidious in self-criticism) to rejoice. There is more palate than sky, certainly. The boyish rebel, the cafe esthete, the suave diabolist, the would-be convert to Francis Jammes and Catholicism—all gave way to Ilya Ehrenburg, the well known Stalinist weathervane.

"Many of my contemporaries," he writes,

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> have found themselves under the wheels of time. I have survived—not because I was stronger or more far-seeing, but because there are times when the fate of a man is not like a game of chess dependent on skill, but like a lottery.

This is almost too modest. Yet we should not leap to judgment, for whether we know it or not we all owe something to Ehrenburg's survival.

In 1954, Ehrenburg published a short novel which gave its name to the current Soviet period, *The Thaw*. By the time a sequel, *The Spring*, appeared in 1956, it seemed relatively uncontroversial and even a bit old-fashioned, so much had happened between. *The Thaw* is full of casual but sensitive references to a change of political climate, which Ehrenburg certainly did not create, but which he was one of the first to record, at least in its implications for the life of art. *The Thaw* is not without a certain delicacy of touch, some shrewd observations and some good lines. ("Kryukov cursed the painters for being pessimistic and shouted: 'We must have optimism' and then took to drink and was taken off to the hospital. . . .") Yet a vague atmosphere of soap-opera clings to it, and most of the lightly-drawn characters and situations seem more interesting as conversation-pieces—something to talk about later—than they do in immediate confrontation. The only exception is the cynical, embittered Vladimir Pukhov, an artist *manqué* —and here Ehrenburg seems to be concerned with himself:

> He said that everybody did pot-boilers, and that was nothing to be surprised at; and that turnips were more necessary than art; but nobody ever thought of spelling turnip with a capital T and nobody made a drama out of forwarding the cause of turnips, they just planted them and served them. You had to live as best you could.

Pukhov has a friend, Saburov (Pasternak? Robert Falk?), who works away at his art in poverty and neglect. Pukhov feels this as a reproach. He lashes out—now at art, now at Saburov, now at himself or others—and especially at the idea that he, Pukhov, ever had any real talent at all. "What can you expect of an expert in the art of pot-boiling who is suddenly seized with an urge for real, true art?" His future role, however, is perhaps hinted at by an elderly counsellor who reminds him that in ancient times, "the cynics . . . wandered from place to place telling people unwelcome truths."

Since 1954, and especially 1956, Ehrenburg has had an extremely important role thrust upon him. The death of Stalin and the ever more detailed, ever more horrifying revelations concerning his regime that have followed, have led to a great crisis in authority, comparable in depth and scope to the crisis within European Catholicism at the turn of the fifteenth century. No one knows yet what its results will be, but Stalin's totalitarianism is a thing of the past. The Communist

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Party survives and will continue to survive, but only at the expense of far-reaching changes in its nature, the full implications of which cannot be known even to its leaders. The established middle class wants peace and security—yet it is uneasy and guilty before the disquiet and discontent of the lower orders on the one hand and its own intellectual children on the other. It is unwilling, and indeed unable, to abandon arbitrary power and privilege, yet uneasy in their exercise. The "children" are eager to break away from the stereotyped pseudo-culture of their "fathers," redolent as it is with the smell of blood. Either down with politics altogether, or else redeem the meaning the revolution held in its more romantic phase. That period of wild rebelliousness in the arts between 1891 and 1921, when Russia was not merely part of but was pressing to the fore of a worldwide movement, that period when modern art came truly into its own, exercises an ineluctable fascination over young Soviet intellectuals. Whether for those who wish to break away from public clamor into the problematics of everyday life, or for those whose main concern is to humanize and revitalize the Communist Party itself—art seems to offer once again the warmth of a true community. Any true community needs to know its past and its connections with the world at large. This is where Ehrenburg comes in. "History," he writes, "is full of gorges and abysses, and men have need of bridges, however fragile, to link one epoch with another."

People and Life is not about Ehrenburg, it is about art. Concerning his personal and family life, his politics, his religion, Ehrenburg is extremely reticent except insofar as these open out immediately into his concern for art. Much that many would like to know about his past is not told, or is merely ambiguously and elusively hinted at. Yet art is dramatized in terms of the figures who represented it, who in some way or other played a part in Ehrenburg's life, and with whom he was involved. How deeply or how personally involved is for the most part difficult to judge from the memoirs. There is none of that love of personal detail, that careful building of character from anecdote, that massive following-through that distinguishes the more old-fashioned memoirs of Konstantin Paustovsky. There are brilliantly recollected flashes, dramatic metaphors, connections established between past and present. Many of the characterizations are brilliant. But they are not (with a few notable exceptions) warm; and they are not personal. Ehrenburg seems, in fact, immune to "confession."

He has a good eye. Here, for an example, is his description of Savinkov, the former terrorist, at the time in question an habitué of the bohemian cafés, a man Winston Churchill thought "great," primarily, one suspects, because he fought the Bolsheviks:

> For me, however, Savinkov was part of the landscape of war. He was like a narrow strip of no-man's land where there is not a single blade of grass and where, among the barbed wire, you can see broken

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rifles, tin hats, and the remains of soldiers who had failed to reach the enemy trenches.

The first part of *People and Life* deals mostly with bohemian Paris between 1908 and 1918, with the Café Rotonde and those who frequented it. Evocatively, Ehrenburg tells of the impact of Paris on a wild and rebellious young barbarian. He conveys, with what he calls "the romanticism of the unromantic," a sense of the milieu, its solidarity against the world of respectability, its rebellion against the academic and the bourgeois. One point Ehrenburg argues with vehement clarity—the importance of tradition in the revolt against tradition.

The world in which Ehrenburg lived was that of Apollinaire and Blaise Cendrars, of Picasso, Léger and Matisse, the tragic Modigliani and the exuberant Diego Rivera—models he never quite managed to emulate, but a sense of whose worth he preserves and conveys to a whole generation of Soviet youth, who cannot but look at it all with big and absorbent eyes.

"Thoughts engendered by reminiscence—"that is Ehrenburg's avowed method, and he uses it well. The second part of *People and Life* deals with his return to Russia and the stormy years of the revolution, between 1918 and 1921. He tries to explain his ambiguous attitude towards the revolution, and here again the explanation reduces itself to a concern with art. He includes a series of remarkable portraits of writers and artists of the period: Mayakovsky, Pasternak, Esenin, Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva, Meyerhold, Robert Falk, and others. So many of them ended tragically, so many of them failed to resolve their ambiguous relationship to the revolution, deeper than Ehrenburg's; so many had it resolved for them by a clout on the head. Ehrenburg does not say straight out his doubts were well founded. He has lived, as he explains, "in an age when a man was often judged on the basis of a questionnaire," and he has learned to be discreet. The non-conformist wildboy, so much admired in Paris, is, after all, far from being a true rebel. The thrust of his thinking is, however, clear. Not that he rejects the revolution. He is, on the contrary, anxious to prove that his revolutionary credentials are as good as anyone's. He accepts his responsibilities, however, in the current confused but powerful movement of humanization and liberalization. I do not think we can afford to wish him ill.

Olga Carlisle's *Voices in the Snow* witnesses, among other things, Ehrenburg's role in the current upsurge of the arts, and her book takes on some of the drama of the Soviet situation by virtue of the fact that she is the granddaughter of Leonid Andreyev and the daughter of a minor emigré poet, Vadim Andreyev. She is part of that quest for cultural community through art that I have mentioned in connection

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with Ehrenburg. The nostalgia and curiosity of those she met combined with her own to create an atmosphere congenial to good talk. She describes better than most, and with a better understanding, that fascinating, touching world of poetry-readings, literary disputes, sociability and argument that other visitors have seen from a more impersonal distance. Sholokhov opened up to her. Ehrenburg, for all his coldness, talked long and hard. From her account, Pasternak emerges strong and clear in relation to his environment. And she includes a description, the fullest available, of the dramatic trilogy he was working on at the time of his death. Unlike many journalists, she has betrayed no one's trust, nor attempted to turn it to political account. Her sympathy is genuine, and she harbors no grudge.

Yet she has written two books, which should be one, and are not. The book of reporting is quite good. The other is a drama about herself, and it is not as good as it should be. Assailed by difficult and complex emotions, the sense of a life that is hers yet not hers, Mrs. Carlisle is writer enough to grasp the relevance of her personal experience to her main subject, but not writer enough to join them in a coherent whole. In 1919, Leonid Andreyev, Gorky's close friend, broke with the revolution and left Russia. In 1960, his granddaughter, born and raised in France, educated in the United States, returned. This is not in itself an event of world importance, but it has its meanings, and they have not been adequately expressed.

In the summer of 1961, *Partisan Review* published a special issue called *Dissonant Voices in Soviet Literature,* edited by Patricia Blake and Max Hayward. It was violently attacked in the Soviet press as unrepresentative and, in general, a slander on Soviet literature. "Unrepresentative," of course, was precisely what it intended to be, and far from a "slander," it was a fine tribute to the persistence of the creative imagination (embodied in a wide range of poems, stories and essays from 1918 to the present) under the most difficult of conditions. Such hatchet-jobs are now a commonplace. One should perhaps bear in mind that these too are a kind of co-existence and that the Soviet literary bureaucrats are at least bothered a little by what we say.

Miss Blake and Mr. Hayward have now published a considerably expanded version of their anthology. The introduction provides a brief history and acute analysis of Soviet literary politics. In speaking of a current "Zubatov" policy in literature[2] the editors tend to overlook the risks of that policy; many of Zubatov's men became so sincerely and thoroughly committed to their activities that the regime was forced to bring them to a halt. But that is a small point. The editorial

[2] This analogy refers to the policy of "police socialism" inaugurated by the tsarist regime around the turn of the century. Its aim was to divert discontent among the workers into channels that could be controlled by the regime. The implication for the present is that certain "trusted" Party writers are specifically encouraged to write non-conformist books.

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skill shown throughout, as well as the quality of the translations, is thoroughly admirable.

The anthology begins with an extraordinary prose fragment by Pasternak, published for the first time in 1918. Apart from a superb Pasternakian snowstorm, it contains a startling anticipation of the characters and theme of *Doctor Zhivago*. In view of the recent Soviet attempts to discount *Zhivago* as an aberration from the main body of Pasternak's work, the product of Mme. Ivinskaya's influence, this is of more than casual interest. The anthology contains also a previously untranslated story by Isaak Babel, one of his best. Yuri Kazakov, one of the younger Soviet writers who deserves to be better known in this country, is represented by a fine story, reminiscent of Turgenev's "The Singers," and in its own way about art. Last but not least there is a parable on totalitarianism (and the resistance offered by art to its assault on human dignity) by a pseudonymous writer who calls himself Nikolai Arzak. He is almost as good as Abram Tertz.

Although literary excellence has obviously not been the only criterion for inclusion, quality is high throughout. I wish more poems had been included, especially since lyric poetry has been on the whole the form most resistant to the corrosion of "socialist realism." I miss Zabolotsky and Mandelstam and Akhmatova, as well as a number of the younger poets. I think, also, the editors overestimate Tendryakov's story, which reminds me a little of the unfortunate Russian enthusiasm for Jack London, and I am not as impressed by Grin and Kassil as they are. But there is not a single really *dull* piece in the book. For an anthology of Soviet literature, *that* is something.

In November, 1962, when the Central Committee of the Communist Party convened in Moscow to prepare for the celebration of one more anniversary of the revolution, Khrushchev personally distributed to its members five thousand copies of a short novel by a previously unknown writer, Alexander Isayevich Solzhenitsyn. The novel, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich,* happens to be a masterpiece, but not exactly festive.

Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, who was captured by the Germans in the early days of the war, who escaped back to his own lines, who was accused of treason, who "confessed" because he had no alternative, manages to live through an "ordinary" day in one of Stalin's "ordinary" Central Asian concentration camps. The experience is familiar to Russians: their story, in fact. On one level it is an account of a prison; on another, a parable of life anywhere in Stalin's Russia. The book-dividend was no doubt intended to remind the comrades of past alternatives to Khrushchev's policies.

Solzhenitsyn, a somber man from his pictures, with a face a little like Camus', a little like Kafka's, became a writer late in life. In his youth, he was a physicist. He is now forty-five. During the war, he served

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with distinction as an officer in the Red Army. Then he was arrested and spent eight years in concentration camps and three more in Siberian exile.

This is not, however, a book carried off by force of personal involvement alone, an amateur's book. I have read many accounts of concentration camps, Nazi and Soviet, all of them horrifying, some of them acute in their understanding of the role of the camps in totalitarian society and in their observations on the behavior of guards and inmates. Yet none of these accounts has the immediacy, the direct quality of an experience lived, that distinguishes Solzhenitsyn's book. Dostoevsky's *Notes from the House of the Dead* immediately suggests itself as an apt comparison. But even that great parable of life as a prison, beside *One Day,* seems a little intellectualized, a little contrived.

Prison, for those who are innocently there, assaults the will to survive and that minimal, basic sense of worth on which the will to survive depends. If the prisoner is to live through conditions of the utmost physical hardship (and *to* what? sentences in the concentration camps were indeterminate), conditions which force him into a constant and terrifying awareness of his own fragility, he must keep his identity when for everyone else he is a mere number. The concentration camp is ironically named, for its inmate is forced to concentrate, not merely on his soul, but on that frightening dependence of the soul on the bowels. The most meager events become fraught with significance.

Solzhenitsyn conveys all this in a style heavy with camp jargon, but clear, controlled, terse, understated and completely transparent, as though there were no obstacle between the reader and the life represented. The terrifying logic of the body's rebellion against hardship is contrasted with the terrifying absurdity of the camp's routine.

There is no expression of horror or amazement, no attempt at analysis or explanation. Ivan Denisovich Shukhov has been in the camp ten years. Conditions are what they are. He scrounges for food and protects himself against the cold. With painstaking attention, he strives to control and conserve his bodily movements. He reflects that a member of his work-gang, Fetyukov, a former big-shot, has lost his sense of himself and is probably a "goner." Ivan Denisovich, in spite of himself, gets excited by the "work sense" of a good team building a wall. He manages to steal past the camp guards a small piece of scrap-metal, out of which he can later make a tool. He does not try to understand his presence in the camp. Occasionally, he is a little troubled about how things are going in his native village—removed from the concentration camp only by the presence of his family and a slightly lesser degree of hardship. In the morning, he feels a cramped apprehension about a slight fever he is running; he is worried his gang may be removed to a new job, which, as he ponders it, looms with irony and menace:

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> They'd heard a lot of talk about switching their gang from putting up workshops to a new job, building a new "Socialist Community Development." But so far it was nothing more than bare fields covered with snowdrifts, and before anything could be done there, holes had to be dug, posts put in, and barbed wire strung up—by the prisoners, for the prisoners, so they couldn't get out. And then they could start building.

In the evening, he finds he has, after all, made it through the day.

There are no atrocities, no acts of heroism. Ivan Denisovich himself could not be more ordinary. Yet everything he does, thinks or sees is invested with an enormous pathos:

> He began to eat. He started with the watery stuff on the top and drank it right down. The warmth went through his body and his insides were sort of quivering waiting for that gruel to come down. . . .
>
> Shukhov started to pick out the cabbage in his bowl. There was only one piece of potato. . . . It wasn't much of a potato. It was frostbitten of course, a little hard and on the sweet side. And there was hardly any fish, just a piece of bone here and there without any flesh on it. But every little fishbone and every piece of fin had to be sucked to get all the juice out of it—it was good for you. . . .

Ivan Denisovich at work takes pride in a job well done, even though there is no point to the work and not much reward. He carefully removes his hat in the mess-hall, and he carefully wipes his spoon before returning it to his boot when finished eating. He stands in line for a fellow-prisoner who is expecting a package from home (it is twenty below zero, and the line is slow), and he brings him the package; he expects to be rewarded, but he does not ask—that would compromise his dignity, and he would be ready to join the "goners." After his evening meal, Ivan Denisovich notices one of his fellow-prisoners, labelled Y-81:

> Shukhov had been told that this old man'd been in camps and prisons more years than you could count and had never come under any amnesty. When one ten-year stretch was over they slapped on another. Shukhov took a good look at him close up. In the camp you could pick him out among all the men with their bent backs because he was straight as a ramrod. When he sat at the table it looked like he was sitting on something to raise himself up higher. No reason to shave off his head for a long time—he'd lost all his hair because of the good life. His eyes didn't shift around the mess-hall all the time to see what was going on, and he was staring over Shukhov's head and looking at something nobody else could see. He ate his thin gruel with a worn old wooden spoon, and he took his time. He didn't bend down low over the bowl like all the others did,

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but brought the spoon up to his mouth. He didn't have a single tooth either top or bottom—he chewed the bread with his hard gums like they were teeth. His face was all worn out but not like a "goner's"—it was dark and looked like it had been hewed out of stone. And you could tell from his big rough hands with the dirt worked in them he hadn't spent many of his long years doing any of the soft jobs. You could see his mind was set on one thing—never to give in. He didn't put his eight ounces in all the filth on the table like everybody else but laid it on a clean little piece of rag that'd been washed over and over again.

There are those who keep their dignity, and those who don't.

For Ivan Denisovich, however, "we" and "they" are the prisoners and the camp authorities. And even here, the gradations are numerous—trusties, warders, cooks, privileged ones among the prisoners; officers, spies, agents among the guards. No one is so powerful as not to dread a higher authority. And sometimes the powerless imitate the powerful at the expense of those weaker than themselves. The guards share a world with the prisoners, strapped to the same insanity. Around the camp live so-called "free workers," new colonists of Central Asia, released from prison but unable to return home. And beyond that, the universe, crushed by the same cruel division. The guards man the lights and march their rounds. The prisoners fumble in the cold and keep lining up in perpetual ranks of five. Some steal; some are "squealers." A sense of elemental solidarity remains, the powerless against the powerful, the human against the absurd, life against death. It had been, after all, Ivan Denisovich reflects, a "good" day:

> There were three thousand six hundred and fifty three days like this in his sentence, from reveille to lights out.
>
> The three extra ones were because of the leap years. . . .

It would perhaps be best, as Solzhenitsyn does, to end here. Unfortunately, Solzhenitsyn's Russian tragedy is now being followed by an American comedy that seems to call for some comment. Two publishers are competing to present this book to the American public. Dutton claims "the only authorized version." Praeger, it seems, distrusting Moscow, commissioned another translation. In my opinion, the Praeger translation is better. As though to compensate for this, however, Praeger insists on including a leaflet denouncing the "official" translator as a communist and professional slanderer, though leaving it dark as to how all this affects his skill as a translator. Perhaps no comment is necessary after all.

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JOHN HOLLOWAY

A Perpetual Showing[1]

WARS ARE INDEED, to use Jones's word, parentheses. Those who care for literature will of course find, if they turn to the 1914-18 years, that the nodal points are Lawrence cut off in Cornwall, Pound and Yeats retiring to a cottage in Sussex, Eliot alone in London, Sassoon and Owen in the crowded loneliness of the trenches. And in surveying the poetic transformations of those years—for there were two, that of the expatriate Americans, and that of the later war poets who had much affinity but little contact with them—they will see a striking anomaly. For the War itself, obviously the most spectacular human reality of the period, made no contact with what was spectacularly "Modern" in the poetry. Neither Pound, nor Eliot, nor anyone else brought the two together. When Pound moves towards this (as in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* iv and v, for example) he has no vision of War as a self-subsistent reality, and in briefly adverting to it is concerned with its relation to the old bitch gone in the teeth, the botched civilization of civil society. Yet if the prose classics of the war—*Goodbye to All That, Blasting and Bombardiering, Undertones of War*—have one thing in common, it is their all-pervading consciousness of how the trenches made a self-subsistent, a unique world of their own, fearful yet humane. Yet this immense fact did not get into the new verse: a curious discrepancy.

Had Owen and Rosenberg lived things might of course have been different. As it was, twenty years had to pass before David Jones's *In Parenthesis* brought the Great War and the New Verse together, and in doing so provided a point of reference for the literary historian, by the help of which the poetry of the last forty years settles into order as it does not otherwise. Eliot was quick to see Jones's importance, and also to see the "affinity" (his own cautious, characteristic word) between Jones's work and that of Joyce, Pound and himself. Others in Britain who have written about the period (including, I am sorry to say, myself) have been slower. Jones is not mentioned in Fraser's *Modern Writer and his World,* nor in de Sola Pinto's *Crisis in Modern Poetry,* nor in the *Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse.* Because it has been ignored, the plain fact of historical development needs mention in the first place. Without Jones, the design of modern poetry has a hole in it.

For the point to stand, of course, we must admit *In Parenthesis* as verse not prose. In a sense, the very existence of the question clinches the "Modernist" quality of the book:

1 IN PARENTHESIS, by *David Jones.* Faber, 1937; reprinted by the Chilmark Press, 1962. $5.75. THE ANATHEMATA, by *David Jones.* Faber, 1952; reprinted by the Chilmark Press, 1963. $5.75.

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> Sorry mate—you all right china?—lift us yer rifle—an'
> don't take on so Honey—but rather, mind
> the wire here
> mind the wire
> mind the wire
> mind the wire

> . . . . Wired dolls sideway inclining, up and down nodding, fantastic troll-steppers in and out the uncertain cool radiance, amazed crook-back miming, where sudden chemical flare, low-flashed between the crazy flats, flood-lit their sack-bodies. . . .

This is not one of the many passages I should cite if I wanted only to belaud the book, but I think that it briefly indicates a good deal of its strength and weakness. The—not nerve, but skeleton of the work, the simple event of some British troops moving up to the line and later taking part in an attack, is filtered to the reader—but the better, the historically suggestive word is, *filmed* to the reader—by resources of technique which are familiar even from *The Waste Land*. Vivid snatches of conversation emerge from what I could call stark vignettes of environment. "Snatches" is a clue, for Jones is not a novelist. The realism of his dialogue does not grow into reality of character. For all their vivid raciness, his people remain disjointed, unindividual and remote (reality of character, indeed, never comes from faithful surfaces, but from clarity of conception, inner coherence, and space to grow). But the passage I quoted shows where much of the strength lies; though to say that it lies in his first reputation, that of being a painter, is to invite being misunderstood.

In Parenthesis is not a painter's book because it is a gallery of unfeeling and externalized set-pieces. What is painterly is first its humanity.

> Each one sat silent, all in a row, some smoked, all were mirrored in the leaden water. . . . Behind each, his rifle leant at an ordered inclination against the parapet . . . and round their legs, and about their necks, like tied amices, were hessian coverings.

So also is it painterly in its firm, close grasp of feels and tangs, textures and hardness, the sharp prominence of small plain things in a harsh life:

> The last candle was snuffed out and thrust still warm at the wick into your tunic pocket.

> . . . they had spread a Union Jack on piled biscuit tins, behind the 8 in. siege, whose regular discharges made quite inaudible the careful artistry of the prayers he read.

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> Behind 'E' Battery, fifty yards down the road, a great many mangolds, uprooted, pulped, congealed with chemical earth, spattered and made slippery the rigid boards leading to the emplacement. The sap of vegetables slobbered the spotless breech-block of No. 3 gun.

This last passage (it describes the results of a big shell exploding) begins to show why Mr. Enright dismissed Jones's style with the now dread word "tapestried": example of that terror of the ambitious which has hobbled English verse, and the criticism of it, for two decades. Jones's elaborate descriptive passages, elaborately woven if you like, are no more than one band in a capacious verbal spectrum. The richly humdrum, the plain and moving ("he turned between where bees hived, between low plants, to his presbytery"), the coarsely vernacular, all have their places too.

But there is another kind of ambition at work in the poem: to tell not merely a plain and moving, nor even a brilliant and colourful tale, but one radiant also in depth.

> Every man's speech and habit of mind were *a perpetual showing*: now of Napier's expedition, now of the Legions at the Wall . . . now of Coel Hên . . .

And this perpetual showing is what Jones has taken his stand by. So, when a cockney soldier has been speaking of his regiment's battle-honours, "Private Dai" replies:

> My fathers were with the Black Prinse [*sic*] of Wales . . .
> I was the spear in Balin's hand
> that made waste King Pellam's land . . .
> On Badon hill . . .
> We staked trip-wire as a precaution at
> Troy Novaunt. . . .
> I saw Him die . . .

I telescope from 300 lines; but this long "boasting" passage, in one sense authentically bardic (Jones's notes refer the reader to Widsith, Taliessin, and Christ's "before Abraham was, I am") represents a recurrent movement in the work. The reader, however, is not at ease. No question that this movement adds to the seriousness of the undertaking, and intellectually to its depth and range and interest. No doubt that it keeps one thinking busily. But busy thought is not an invitation characteristic of poetry (though of course compatible with those invitations); and these recessions into radiant depth leave a sense of something at once willed and wrenched.

I leave that last word unexplained, because *The Anathemata* makes it clearer as it does everything else. Of the two works, the later one is perhaps the less successful, but it is much the more ambitious, and what it attempts is deeply and centrally significant. Many writers bemoan, but when it comes to the test most evade, the crisis of culture

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in our time. *The Anathemata* tries to meet it, answer it, on what we have almost lost the very sight of: a scale commensurate with what is at issue. The poem, that is to say, attempts the authentic and traditional task of epic: to show a people itself from the very roots. In a society which has miniaturized its poems almost as much as its radios, this deserves salutation and gratitude whether it succeeds or fails; it is central, inescapable, the act of a major figure.

The poem's guiding intention, then, is to recover, and thereby of course *re*-create to the extent even of in part creating, the myths or rather the Myth of Britain. In the early sections there is a shadowy thread of narrative, evoking (the just word) the pre-history of Northern Europe, and the early settlement of the island (in which Brut our legendary eponymous hero, the early Tyrian traders, perhaps Augustine or Joseph of Arimathea, perhaps Christ himself, seem to play interchanging rôles). Narrative extends into Anglo-Saxon times, but disappears as the poem moves to Albion and the apotheosis of London (it is this remarkable section which makes one speak of the creation of myth as well as of its re-creation). The later sections of the poem comprise a dithyrambic celebration of the ship, the siege-engine and the cross as recurrent and once more interchangeable symbols of the national *Mythos,* and finally a celebration of Christ's life and meaning in which Christian, classical, Arthurian and a good deal else converge and run into each other.

"Modernist" in its rejection of narrative, the poem is also modernist in the detail of its technical resource. This, the title proves. "I mean by my title as much as it can be made to mean, or can evoke or suggest, however obliquely." Those words are enough by themselves, of course, to place Jones historically. By "Anathemata" he means whatever enters the dimension of the mythical in that it has *mana*: is ambivalently numinous in a by now familiar sense. That he adds six other meanings to this basic one merely illustrates the plethoric quality of the poem—"evoke or suggest, however obliquely"—about which there is more to say. Like many of us, Jones believes that

> on the couch of time
> departed myth
> left ravished fact . . .

The nineteenth century was a lesion when society broke with myth and settled for formulae. The aim of the poem is to repair the break, re-energizing the world of atrophied legend until the numinous is once again luminous, and the plain man conscious of a radiance which surrounds the plain facts of life with haloes of mythical meaning receding into each other until they interplay and almost interchange. "The complete consort dancing together."

Eliot's words strike home; for just as *In Parenthesis* triangulated, one could say, from the matter of the later war poets and the technique

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of the "Modernists," so *The Anathemata* triangulates from the Modernists' later work. Those who jib at this do so because they suppose such triangulation to be a recipe for poetic success ("to go back to Pound and Eliot and go on from there," one English critic formulated the recipe recently) instead of simply one form of recent historical development. Jones's poem performs this triangulation in that, while its basic drive is towards a recovered sense of tradition and continuity (so much part of the *Quartets*), it conducts its main enterprise, like the *Cantos,* by amassing an encyclopaedia of recondite particulars which, again like the *Cantos* to a considerable extent, it presents in what Pound called "the mode of super-position": a juxtaposing which, in intention anyhow, bypasses logic and reverberates through the imagination direct.

So here, again much abridged, is Christ's "Boast" from *The Anathemata,* to set beside those of Widsith, Taliessin and Private Dai:

Alpha es et O
that which
the whole world cannot hold.
Atheling to the heaven-king.
Harrower of Annwn.
Freer of the Waters.
Chief Physician and
dux et pontifex.
Gwledig Nefoedd and
Walda of *every* land
et vocabitur WONDERFUL.
Coming with great power
Twelve *legiones* . . .

For an anamnesis of whom
is said daily
at the Stone:
hostiam immaculatam
aberth pur, aberth glân.
Lar of Lares Consitivi
Himself the Lar and the garner . . .

Out from the mother (coronate of the daughter)
bearing the corn-stalks.
Exact Archon (by whom Astraea on Themis)
Lord Paraclete of the Assize—
Yet who alone is named MISERICORS.

Clearly, when Jones says that poetry is "occupied with the embodiment and expression of the mythus and deposits comprising (a nation's) cultural complex," he means it; and his notes on this passage help

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those who need help—and who does not?—to pick up the references to the Celtic Hades, the Percival legend, the Anglo-Saxon world, the Mass, and lastly Christ as identified with Persephone-Triptolemus in both their agricultural and Rhadamanthine aspects.

But the question is, whether when all this "recession and thickness," this "totality of connotation" has been reread and run over and run together, we are left with poetry or with something else. It happens that Welsh words, which totally gravel many English readers, and the pronunciation of which Jones has to provide, syllable by syllable, in his footnotes, look no more outlandish to me than English ones (which is not to say that I am proficient in that language). But if this qualification is an irrelevance with regard to me, so it is with regard to him. The passage I have just quoted is venial over Welsh, but it certainly begins to show that constant leaning on Celtic legend, Welsh language, and Roman ritual, which in the end seems to introduce into the poem a radical distortion and asymmetry, a lapse from objective to subjective, public to idiosyncratic and private, and which I had in mind when I used the word "wrenched" earlier on. And this is wholly at odds with the status and intention of epic which the poem indisputably claims. Nor is this in any way a matter of the critic's subjectivity against the author's, of the former telling the latter what to write about. It is to challenge the general validity, as a resurrection of the *mythos* of the people of Britain (or let us say England-and-Wales) of a work which tracks down every London city parish, but is silent over Durham, Canterbury, Winchester and the great wool churches; which is full of Geoffrey of Monmouth and the *Mabinogion,* but barely hints at Shakespeare; or which draws on the Mass of St. Gabriel and the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, but makes nothing of St. Aidan, Ockham, Wycliff, the English Prayer Book, or the Authorized Version.

The point could be put another way: as a radical divergence between performance and programme; for the programme is clearly laid down in the *Preface,* and it is there that the careful reader can see "We" turning into "I," and "the embodiment and expression of the mythus and deposits comprising that cultural complex" to which *artists in general* belong, to "matters of all sorts which, by a kind of quasi-free association, are apt to stir in my mind at any time"; and turn out to come from (among other sources, some of them no less eccentric, in the strict sense of that word) a catalogue of Welsh samplers and a guide-book to the Isle of Wight.

This is meant as condemnation only within limits. "Quasi-free association," "what I have written has no plan, or rather is not planned . . . what goes before conditions what comes after and *vice versa*" are not recipes for badness. The point is merely that they are not recipes for epic, for a national mythos. They are, in fact, something like recipes for Modernist poetry; and their provenance, back to

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Mallarmé's "suggerér, violà le rêve," is familiar. But since the time of Mallarmé, the poetry of evoke-however-obliquely has undergone a curious transformation from "alchimie du *verbe*" (the phrase is not of course Mallarmé's) almost to its opposite: an evoking and suggesting which employs Pound's "mode of super-position" for *items of fact alone,* presented in a language-texture of as it were zero density. This fact might be traced in the *Cantos.* True, certain areas of life cannot ever but call out from the *miglior fabbro* a marvellous felicity that Jones never comes near ("The cut cool of the air,/ Blossoms cut on the wind, by Helios/ Lord of the light's edge": 29 . . . "To see the light pour,/ that is, towards sinceritas/ of the word": 99). But there are Saharan stretches of the middle Cantos where anything that anyone could call a poetic texture of language is replaced by the mode of super-position operating either polyglot-wise between languages themselves, or between massive *blocs* of allegedly significant fact (Chinese, American, Italian history for example). Inter-inanimating life is to stream from Ens not Logos.

So with the passage from *The Anathemata* quoted above: the reader can go back to it if he is in doubt. And so with most though not quite all of the poem. The alchemy which is to make the worlds of Celtic, Saxon, Roman, Hebrew and Greek myth inter-penetrate and grow radiant lies in their perpetual showing in closest juxtaposition. Until, at its most clotted and forced, the poem has passages like:

> And then he must . . . relate in a clear high voice from this Aramean brut [*sic*], how that within six months from the beginning of the Sixth Age of the World, our divine Ymherawdr Octavian, ever august, of the blood of the progenitress the Purifier, Turner of Hearts and of Mars Pencawr (the *old* Pantocrator) . . .

At this stage it is right (once one has drawn breath) to look once more at

> on the couch of time
> departed myth
> left ravished fact . . .

The underlying metaphor has gone wrong. Jones cannot have meant to suggest that myth was the Tarquin. Subtle exactness of metaphor is only one kind of local life in poetry; but the flaw, even if a small one, is perhaps revealing. A poem is a perpetual making as well as showing.

Ultimately, much of the interest of *The Anathemata* is that besides being a poem of great originality, of immense if bewildered learning, and of serious and unusual relevance to the cultural problems of our time, it also enables its readers to reflect on, and comprehend with a new clarity, something of the ultimate limits of the technical resources within which it is written: resources, that is, among those most charac-

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teristic of Modernist poetry, which our pundits scold us for not following on from, though often they have conspicuously not followed on from it themselves.

For the fact—learnable from the *Quartets,* where it is provided for, from the *Cantos,* where over long stretches it is not, and from *The Anathemata,* which does indeed "go on from there"—is that erudition, with all that that implies of quotation, cross-reference, allusion, comparison, or a hail, simply, of recondite and piquant minute particulars —erudition and super-position *are not in themselves poetic activities at all.* It is obvious as soon as it is stated. Of these north and south poles of the Eliot-Pound achievement, the first is not the natural staple, and the second not the natural mode, of the poetic imagination. The natural staple of the poetic imagination is not facts but language, and its natural mode of expression is the complex with inevitable development and thence organic unity. This the author of *Widsith* had not forgotten. Widsith's boast was that of the bard as a realized character, and was integral with everything in his nature, mood and status. Private Dai (shadowiest of people in any case) was here only a mouthpiece for the author at his perpetual showing. In the end, all the immense elaboration of *The Anathemata* reduces to something very simple: to one relation repeated over and over, an endless catachresis of *hinted identity,* thrown off from a diffused agitation of particulars, a quasi-free association, a recession and thickness, a transfinite array of not-plannednesses. And by itself the mode of super-position can produce nothing but hinted identity or its opposite, a kind of hinted contrast. It is not an organizing relation, but a non-organizing one. Unless it is the servant of a deeper architectonic—and it is this, and nothing other than this, which can enrich the verbal texture of a literary work in a meaningful way—baldest accretion is what the mode of superposition naturally and characteristically creates, and the limit of its unaided powers.

If this train of thought is right, it explains a major though in a way paradoxical fact about *The Anathemata.* Which is, that although its *himmlische Länge* of what I should like to call *Mars-Pencawr-the-*old-*Pantocrator* texture constitutes a work of deep seriousness, and high interest, one for the existence of which everyone who cares about society or thinks about poetry should be grateful, *The Anathemata,* save for a handful of rather striking and very uncharacteristic passages, is poetically a work of almost astonishing boredom. The author, who is a large-minded man, admits this possibility in his Preface (pp. 34-5); but he cannot have recognized how large boredom bulks in his poem. Boredom, mind you, strictly from the standpoint of poetry: from another standpoint the London material, for example, or that about ships, is absorbing, and everywhere the work invites a busy mental activity with which boredom in the general sense cannot co-exist. But almost throughout, there is a radical disregard of what busy mental

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activities belong with and are compatible with the life of the imagination, and the inextricable vision-and-delight which are the signs of that life. To make this criticism is not of course to lament mere difficulty, which in this day and age would be fatuous. It is to identify, within the difficulty, first an idiosyncrasy, and ultimately a kind of erudite triteness, which do not create poetry but preclude it.

Some will give this judgement less weight (and some, I hope, more) because if we have to judge the *Cantos* as a single poem 109 or more sections long, I should say something like the same thing of that work also. Compared with *The Anathemata,* the passages in the *Cantos* about which it is imperative to say something else are longer and more numerous, their local merit is much greater, and their contribution to the whole work therefore perhaps of another order. Moreover, there is in the *Cantos* (though sadly obscured enough) a glowingly rewarding sense of something more important and central than the life of myth; it is, if you like, the myth of life—how life works, what men do and are like, how good and evil enter their enduring labours. I find more of this in *In Parenthesis* than in *The Anathemata,* and that is largely why I like it better.

Saying these things does not of course range one with those who seem to repudiate Modernism in poetry: of these we have a number in England, like Mr. Macbeth with his predilection for Lascelles Abercrombie, or Mr. Larkin with his for Stevie Smith. It attempts to recognize how certain of the techniques of Modernism naturally have a limit to their potential. We should make points of the same kind if we tried to explain why God is the worst part of *Paradise Lost,* why Pope fails with Homer, why English Romantic poets failed in drama; and it is a measure of the interest of David Jones's two works that they call out reflection at this level, lighting up the intrinsic powers of the tools of poetry, which constitute one of the fundamentals of the art, perhaps the most fundamental of all.

LOUIS SIMPSON

Poetry Chronicle

RECENTLY IN THIS MAGAZINE Mr. John Simon compared a specimen of contemporary verse with a "poem" he had made simply by putting together the titles of books of verse. The point of this funny experiment

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was that nowadays it is impossible to tell the difference between verse and nonsense. But as Mr. Simon showed when he got down to cases, it is quite possible to discriminate. If criticism can't tell the difference, surely it isn't poetry that is at fault, but criticism.

The trouble with modern poetry is criticism—rather, the lack of it. For years in America there has been no serious criticism of verse. It is said that this is an age of criticism, but what is meant, I suppose, is that articles about Marvell and Melville appear in the quarterlies; you will look in vain for any discussion of verse that could help contemporary poets. As Mr. Blackmur said in "A Critic's Job of Work," criticism has become an end in itself, a kind of art form. Of course, there have been essays by Mr. Jarrell, Mr. Ciardi, and others, in which they have talked about their contemporaries, but these essays were so whimsical, so unfertile in general ideas, that however amusing they might be, they could hardly encourage poets to write. And without criticism—contrary to what some writers say, who are always complaining that criticism stifles their powers, as well it may—without criticism there can be no important art.

The poets of the twenties—Eliot, Pound, Stevens, Williams—learned to write in an atmosphere of controversy. They were in revolt. But the poets who came to maturity in the late thirties and forties—Schwartz, Shapiro, Ciardi, *et al.*—did not examine received ideas or revolt against anything. They seemed—perhaps it was the Depression and the War—to have been stunned. Instead of criticising they did a rather curious thing: each in his own way settled down to imitating a master—Yeats, or Rilke, or Auden, or Eliot—and what they imitated was not the nerve that had made these men masters, but their style. Though the Depression poets—to give them a name—wrote some good poems, much of their work now seems imitative. They themselves have come to see this, witness the belated attempts of these poets—Shapiro and Lowell, for example—to break with their past and break through to some kind of revelation.

In the fifties appeared the university poets *(New Poets of England and America)* and the beats *(New American Poets)*. The first group apparently came out of writing workshops taught by the Depression poets; the second merely expounded their neuroses. If the Depression poets were hardly aware of criticism, these were even less so. However, out of the university and beat groups came some of the new poets we do have.

Meanwhile, the positions of authority were filled by minor poets of the twenties—people such as Miss Bogan and Mr. Untermeyer. Though they had no ideas about poetry, no authority, they reviewed and judged and anthologized. So we have the situation today, in which the old and the young confront each other across an abyss—in the *Times* or *Saturday Review,* or at some table where prizes are given—with nothing to say to each other. The middle generation, the poets

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who came after Eliot, simply are not there as a critical force. One would be willing to be judged by Mr. Roethke—who doesn't; instead, one is judged by Miss Moore.

Is it any wonder that the new poets seem to be making a complete break with the past, and that their poems are strange? There are many different kinds of poetry being written today, and ideas are flying about—as they were when Eliot and Williams began to publish. At least this is preferable to the silence of the Depression and post-war years. One of the younger poets goes off to study Arabic poetry; another is translating Jimenez; another is in Japan. This may look like confusion, but it is intelligent confusion. And it is no use complaining that traditions are being violated. In America we have no traditions. Writing pseudo-Elizabethan or seventeenth or eighteenth-century English verse in America is not a tradition; it is merely an amusement. In America tradition is another name for laziness.

The following books[1] were written in a vacuum. They illustrate, in one way or another, the ideas I have put forward.

Let us look at two poems. The first is titled "Dublin 1938."

> Old Yeats at the Abbey Theatre,
> Face wounded by his dark eyeglass,
> Stood tall and grave before
> The blasts of young applause:
> That only the words counted—
> All else waste and weariness.
> Nevertheless the man stood,
> Being called: the minute
> Testified with the impermanent body,
> There, which had borne in itself
> Singular victory someway partly ours.

Is there any doubt when this poem was written? It could have been written by Mr. Schwartz or Mr. Ciardi or Mr. Shapiro. It happens to have been written by Mr. Winfield Townley Scott. Clearly, Mr. Scott did not ask himself before he wrote whether he had a subject or language to write in. He had happened to read an anecdote about Yeats's father, and wished to live it over again. Not even the second line, in

[1] COLLECTED POEMS: 1937-1962, by *Winfield Townley Scott*, Macmillan. $7.50. IN FACT, by *John Ciardi*. Rutgers Univ. Press. $3.50. WATERLILY FIRE: POEMS 1935-1962, by *Muriel Rukeyser*. Macmillan. $5.00. COLLECTED VERSE PLAYS, by *Richard Eberhart*. Univ. of North Carolina Press. $5.00. TOMORROW MORNING, FAUSTUS!, by *I. A. Richards*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $3.75. THE COLLECTED POEMS OF WELDON KEES, Ed. by *Donald Justice*. Univ. of Nebraska Press. $1.85. LETTER TO AN IMAGINARY FRIEND, by *Thomas McGrath*. Alan Swallow. $1.65. LONG LIVE MAN, by *Gregory Corso*. New Directions. $1.60. SILENCE IN THE SNOWY FIELDS, by *Robert Bly*. Wesleyan Univ. Press. $1.45 paper; $3.50 cloth. THE DRAWBRIDGE, by *Donald F. Drummond*. Alan Swallow. $2.50. ARRIVALS & DEPARTURES, by *Charles Gullans*. Univ. of Minnesota Press. $2.75.

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which the monocle is described as wounding the face, is original; it had been invented by Proust. The vague conclusion—"Singular victory someway partly ours"—shows that the poem has no significance, and that perhaps the poet has come to realize it. Such writing could only have been done in a critical vacuum.

Now look at this:

> How strange to think of giving up all ambition!
> Suddenly I see with such clear eyes
> The white flake of snow
> That has just fallen in the horse's mane!

Clearly, this poem was not written long ago by Yeats or Barnabe Googe. It was written by Mr. Robert Bly, one of the younger poets. The poem asks you to see and think, and it is written in living speech, not in imitative rhetoric.

In fairness to Mr. Scott, he is a better poet than the above quotation suggests. Newspeak is so prevalent nowadays that one is tempted to speak the truth too harshly. Mr. Scott's troubles are rhetoric on the one hand (especially the rhetoric of Yeats) and prose triviality on the other. In between I have found these poems: a felt, true poem about gathering horsechestnuts; a splendid poem about butterflies; a very interesting poem about Thomas Hardy; the well-known "U. S. Sailor with the Japanese Skull"; the equally well-known "Three American Women and a German Bayonet." There are other good poems too, and if these were selected from the mass one would have a stronger impression of Mr. Scott's talent. As I have quoted him at his worst, I will quote him at his best. This is from the poem about horsechestnuts:

> It was something for nothing, I guess. A few horsechestnuts
> And strings to toss them appeased my generation, but I
> For no utilitarian reason coveted cartloads—
> And there they glistened by hundreds in the rain-thick grass. . . .
>
> It was some minutes after I had dared crawl through
> And had raced back and forth to the burlap bag which my sister
> Sustained half full by strength of herself and the fence
> I saw the rich boy and girl in the window laughing at us.
>
> The house was so far across the lawn that maybe
> They will not see my face redden, my hands' uncertain shame.
> As if I had not been observed I pick up three more
> And show as I leave through the rails that this special work
>
> I've reason to do has been done sufficiently here.
> "Let's go home now." And Jeannette says, "I'll help pull."

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And we start dragging the cart very carefully down the street.
Anyone seeing us can see what we're doing is all right to do.

The objects and actions described here are significant, they are described for a reason. But too often Mr. Scott seems to fall into the delusion that to say a thing exactly is to say something important:

Gray water. The snow-fed sea,
Snow-blind air whisper together.
Sanded wind worries beach rubble,
Rubber shoe, frozen fish, paper.

This is a Depression idea of poetry as photography; the apotheosis was Mr. Shapiro's writing poems in praise of Buicks and mirrors and other objects.

It is a delusion from which Mr. Ciardi hardly ever emerges:

Sometimes in San Francisco, some
times in Santa Fe, sometimes in
even Newburyport, Massachusetts,
or Jacksonville, or Chicago, or
as if the name of what lies out-
side what is always the same hotel
could matter, I am in the dim
room with the neon name, virtually
thinking but ritually resisting
the impulse. . . .

This is informative, like a railway guide. It gives us the stream of Mr. Ciardi's thought—but everyone has a stream of thought of his own, and why should one pay attention to Mr. Ciardi's? The pressure of imagination is very low. Sometimes he rises above the dead level, with tenderness or good humor, but never does he surprise us. Now and then he remembers that he is a poet, and uses a word that has poetic pretensions—"ritually," for example. But poetry is not a matter of mechanics, it is a vision; and vision Mr. Ciardi has not got.

After the praise of mediocrity in recent years, any expression of truth would seem original and revolutionary. In recent years it was possible for the *London Times Literary Supplement* to say that Muriel Rukeyser was "one of America's greatest poets"; it was possible for Louis Untermeyer to say that her "later poetry has achieved a new definiteness as well as greater depth"; it was possible for Mr. Rexroth to praise her in the *New York Times*. Here is an example of her definiteness:

No one ever walking this our only earth, various, very clouded, in
our forests, in all the valleys of our early dreams,
No one has ever for long seen any thing in full, not live
As any one river or man has run his changes, child
Of the swarms and sowings.

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Wherever I pinch this poet, I find the same pudding. The eye slithers over the page. She is like the mattress department at Macy's.

> The sun all male and female through me poured,
> Awake I bought a cargo all of dream,
> Warming-pans for the South, to all the roaring
> Nothing, to those who mock at my song.

I don't want to mock her song. But it *isn't* song, is it? It's anesthesia. I think this book may very well win the Pulitzer or National Book Award this year.

Mr. Richard Eberhart wrote his plays in a vacuum. It is painfully clear that he does not have the slightest idea of what a play is, and no one has ventured to tell him. His idea of drama is to break up a monologue among different speakers. With the possible exception of *The Visionary Farms,* there is no plot in his theater; instead, there is declamation:

> I always knew there would be some dreadful
> Loss of my personality. You want me to renounce
> The very godhead of my deep delight,
> My savage selfhood and my fierce esteem,
> My golden auras and my psychic spleen,
> My adamantine and intolerable presages
> And all my lofty insolence and fire. . . .

Whom did Mr. Eberhart think he was writing these verse plays for? I can hardly imagine even an academic audience, however polite, sitting still for these lectures. Mr. Eberhart's thoughts are hidden in rhetoric—the armor of weak ideas, like the knobs and plates of bone developed by lost reptiles.

Those who are avid for closet drama may also turn to I. A. Richards' *Tomorrow Morning, Faustus!* The Dramatis Personae gives an idea of what you are in for:

> SATAN: elderly, tired, distinguished Personage;
> Chairman of the Board
> BEELZEBUB: harassed Executive; President. . . .

In other words, this is the play you wrote when you were a bright schoolboy; and sensibly you laid it away in a trunk. But in the university it is possible never to grow up. As Goldsmith pointed out two centuries ago, schoolmasters like to unbend, and Mr. Richards is dreadfully jocular:

> BEELZEBUB: . . . This Faustus here, New Model, is equipped—
> Biologically, ontogenetically,
> Psycho-sociologically as well—
> With what must fit him to pick up that radiation,
> Analyze it, encode, relay it here.
> We have him up in orbit, as it were. . . .

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The poet as professor is funnier than he thinks; but it would take Molière to do him justice.

In reading *The Collected Poems of Weldon Kees* I am reminded of the Depression. He is always a poet, nervous and sensitive; every word is clear; his satire is engaging. But he seems to have been stunned; there is an absence of joy; there is even an absence of energy. The energy must flow from the reader toward the poem in sympathy or pity—which is odd, if you think of another concept of the poet, as a man who has energy to bestow. This is one of Kees's best poems:

1926
The porchlight coming on again,
Early November, the dead leaves
Raked in piles, the wicker swing
Creaking. Across the lots
A phonograph is playing *Ja-Da.*

An orange moon. I see the lives
Of neighbors, mapped and marred
Like all the wars ahead, and R.
Insane, B. with his throat cut,

Fifteen years from now, in Omaha.
I did not know them then.
My airedale scratches at the door.
And I am back from seeing Milton Sills
And Doris Kenyon. Twelve years old.
The porchlight coming on again.

In *Letter to an Imaginary Friend* Mr. Thomas McGrath has written an autobiographical poem which is actually about the Depression. He is an uneven writer, sometimes excellent, sometimes rambling and prosy. The good parts occur when he is true to what he saw and felt *then,* as when he describes a boyhood friend, "the last of the real Wobs," and tells how his uncle beat up this man. I doubt there are two or three other poets who can write incident as well as Mr. McGrath. But the narrative goes soft when he philosophizes, trying to pump his feelings above the natural level. You cannot see a light and become Blake, or Whitman, or Lawrence; you have to have the fire in your belly.

There are wonderful things in his long poem:

We'd jump some pheasants and drop them out of the light—
The shotguns clapping and hollow in the empty world of the winter—
And their feathers blazed like jewels in the blank white fields.

And he has an entertaining gift of invective.

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. . . the first man I met was some kind of dean.
O excellent title!
What did it mean? Did the tumbleweed
Blowing out of Saskatchewan know it?
A man, anyhow, thin as a rail and mean
As a cross-barbed barb-wire gate, with flat face to him
Like Picasso's Vallauris plates; all piss and moment,
A pithy pursy bastard, like a quidnunc espaliered
Against the ass of the North wind. . . .

As Mr. McGrath says, the People he celebrates seem to have disappeared:

Went underground about 1941
Nor hide nor hair of 'em since.

This poem, rightly, should have been published years ago. I don't mean that it isn't interesting now, but it is as though it had to go underground, endure the worst years of our prosperity, before it could come out.

Before Spring there is slush, and before the new poetry there was the beat. If anything is clear about the beats, it is that they were ignorant. Now, of ignorance, as it is profound, anything may be expected; yet who could have foreseen that the beats would become academic? This is Mr. Gregory Corso:

After Reading "In the Clearing"
for the author, Robert Frost

Old bard I like you more
now that I know you're
no Saturday Evening Post philosopher
Nay but such who plagiarizes God
Whose pen is a rod
miracling all that is lovely old lovely bard

The spectacle of Mr. Corso discovering that Robert Frost is an author, is funny enough; but the language is funnier: "Nay but such. . . ." This is the avant-garde, and Ella Wheeler Wilcox is its grandmother.

I used to think Mr. Corso's "Marriage" a humorous poem, but now I see that it was humorous by accident. For Mr. Corso, unbelievable as it seems, regards himself with admiration. Here he gazes at himself in a mirror:

Is it a good face what's no more a boy's face?
It seems fatter. And my hair
It's stopped being curly. Is my nose big?

In a poem "Writ on the Eve of My 32nd Birthday" (that's right, Miss Wilcox, "Writ") Mr. Corso looks back on his career:

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32 years old and four hard real funny sad bad wonderful books
of poetry
—the world owes me a million dollars.

He isn't joking; he really thinks he has written four wonderful books.

But let us talk about poetry. What is it? To see what it is we must rid ourselves of delusions, and above all, the Puritan delusions.

When the Puritan looks within himself he sees darkness and serpents. All Hell is waiting to break loose. So the Puritan artist refuses to look within, and adheres to conventional forms. This he calls the life of reason.

Or he plunges into the Hell he imagines. To this Puritan, feeling is a criminal activity. He wants to be through with feeling; he wants to confess; he wants to cease to exist. Like the accused in a Moscow purge, he hastens to rid himself of the last vestiges of human dignity. He hands himself over to his nightmares. He looks at himself in the mirror and sees *Naked Lunch*. And there's your American avant-garde. It is nothing if not masochistic.

If you were to suggest that instinctive life can be good; that the self is not necessarily evil; in short, that the kingdom of God is within—well, you can imagine the letters of protest to the *Village Voice*. We know what life really is. It is horrible, and we want to get through with it as soon as possible. Please Do Not Disturb.

But poetry is from within, from that share of instinctive life which is glad. The life we share with animals and saints is the source of poetry.

Mr. Bly's poems are from the inward man, from the ground of pleasure. And this pleasure is by no means simple:

Inside me there is a confusion of swallows,
Birds flying through the smoke,
And horses galloping excitedly on fields of short grass.

There has been very little poetry in English that represents states of being. Wordsworth's is the only great poetry in English to have done so. Mr. Bly in his poems shows states of being. To do this, he must abandon rhetoric, bringing the poem close to the words we actually use:

When we are in love, we love the grass,
And the barn, and the lightpoles,
And the small mainstreets abandoned all night.

Now this kind of writing will strike you either as totally poetic, or not poetry at all. If you are sold on the English Department, then this poetry is not for you. You would have a devil of a time trying to explicate it according to the principles of Brooks-and-Warren. But if you are bored with the status quo and hope for new poetry, then you

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will find Mr. Bly's *Silence in the Snowy Fields* one of the few original and stimulating books of poetry published in recent years. I do not know any better way to show this than to quote. Here is his "Poem in Three Parts":

I

Oh, on an early morning I think I shall live forever!
I am wrapped in my joyful flesh,
As the grass is wrapped in its cloud of green.

II

Rising from a bed, where I dreamt
Of long rides past castles and hot coals,
The sun lies happily on my knees;
I have suffered and survived the night
Bathed in dark water, like any blade of grass.

III

The strong leaves of the box-elder tree,
Plunging in the wind, call us to disappear
Into the wilds of the universe,
Where we shall sit at the foot of a plant,
And live forever, like the dust.

If you want traditional verse, it is still being turned out. For example, there is Donald F. Drummond's *The Drawbridge*. Mr. Drummond assumes the first Puritan position: that the self is evil, and therefore one is to repress feelings, somehow to become not oneself, and life will be tidy and safe:

. . . yet surely here
One may establish notions, alter means,
And lose his sick endearment with the I.

Mr. Drummond is a victim of the fear which, as Ernest Jones points out in his life of Freud, stood in the way of analysis, and always stands in the way of poetry: that if you discover and release your feelings, harm will result. But of course, as Coleridge said long ago, it is repression that does the damage.

One of the evident faults of traditionalism is the triviality into which it degenerates. This is inevitable, for the traditionalist sticks to the surface of things. He must stick to what is already known; in short, he imitates. His ultimate art is pastiche and parody. In Mr. Drummond's book there are parodies of Eliot, Yeats, and Dylan Thomas.

Finally, traditional poetry is light verse:

We do not dare to climb the stair
Beyond the second turn

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For Norman Cousins may be there
Inducing men to burn.

In Newspeak, the language of jacket blurbs, Mr. Drummond is described as angry and raging—these qualities being the very opposite of what we find when we read his poems.

Mr. Charles Gullans is also a traditional poet. However, he is a more interesting poet than Mr. Drummond, for he manages in some degree to rise above his theories. Though he too has been Winterized, he has qualities of enjoyment and humor which have not yet been censored out. If he can ridicule "The Acts of the Apostles of the Id," on the other hand he seems aware, also, of the absurdity of an English Department:

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Draft must be at hand.
The Second Draft! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image *de statu professoris*
Troubles my mind . . .

It seems strange to find, among poems written with much intelligence, a poem dedicated to C. P. Snow. I can imagine the president of a university welcoming Sir Charles; I can imagine managers and efficiency experts admiring his platitudes. But a poet?

However, Mr. Gullans is a poet, with an attractive lyricism:

Summer, o sweet beguiling,
  lovely, yet untrue,
the rose is still unfolding;
  there swarms in the blue
so many bright possibles,
  lingering in you,
denying the actuals.

Turn from the good expected,
  take the good you see:
this rose is unperfected,
  but it delights me.
The resonance of what is
  comes from what might be:
this rose is all roses. . . .

With the present need of criticism, the need to think what poetry is and what it should be, there is a danger that good poems that do not illustrate one theory or another will be overlooked. The stanzas quoted above strike me as very pleasant, whatever the author's opinions may be.

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ROGER SALE

Gossips and Storytellers[1]

THE LYRIC POET FALLS upon the thorns of life and bleeds, the novelist of gossip remarks he has just learned that a friend of his has fallen on the thorns of life and bled. At once the tangled web of other lives begins to be woven and the single burst of the lyric can be transformed into many thousands of words. The novelist of gossip dissipates the intensity of the lyric and scorns the vision of the genuine storyteller; he relies on anecdote, a complicated sense of society, and, above all, on good talk. The real gossip always finds it fun to imagine in countless ways that someone exists beyond the range of his voice, and he forms the actions of his society out of the difference between a character and what is said about him. A good novel of gossip is as rare as a good anything else, but fake or ordinary ones are so common they tend to dominate the novels of any given season.

Here, to begin, is what I take to be a genuinely lyric novelist:

> My parents tried, on our family doctor's advice, to put an end to my nocturnal wanderings, they surrounded my bed with large basins of water that were to wake me from my somnambulant state when I stepped into them. This treatment resulted in my learning to fly. I increased the horror and the creepiness by artificially induced cold shivers that had the property of making me weightless and with their help, stretched out stiff, I hovered up out of bed, to fly, feet first and lying on my back, straight across the room, through the open window and over the garden.

I trust it is not necessary to understand this in order to praise it, which is from one of those one paragraph novels without a line of dialogue, Peter Weiss's *The Leavetaking*. Weiss's narrator remembers growing up as a part-Jew in Germany between the wars—quiet father, noisy mother, lots of brothers, sisters, nurses, and teachers, perfectly standard fare, as are the memories of being chased home from school, sadistic adolescent fantasies, and suffering scorn for wanting to paint and write. But when a work like this is working well, the fare had better be

1 THE LEAVETAKING, by *Peter Weiss*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $3.75. LIFE AT THE TOP, by *John Braine*. Houghton Mifflin. $4.50. STRIKE THE FATHER DEAD, by *John Wain*. St Martin's. $4.95. AN ERROR OF JUDGEMENT, by *Pamela Hansford Johnson*. Harcourt, Brace & World. $4.50. AN ANSWER FROM LIMBO, by *Brian Moore*. Little, Brown. $5.00. THE VOICES OF GLORY, by *Davis Grubb*. Scribner's. $5.95. THE KINDLY ONES, by *Anthony Powell*. Little, Brown. $4.00. THE DOWNHILL RACERS, by *Oakley Hall*. Viking. $4.75. THE CENTAUR, by *John Updike*. Knopf. $4.00. THE ZEBRA-STRIPED HEARSE, by *Ross Macdonald*. Knopf. $3.50. THE SAND PEBBLES, by *Richard McKenna*. Harper & Row. $5.95.

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standard because the reader needs all the signposts he can get to keep his bearings. The first third of *The Leavetaking* seems to me enchanting in its evocation of the sense that memory transforms experience into dream. But gradually Weiss slips closer to gossip and his sentences begin to move less interestingly, most notably because Weiss "explains" his narrator's mind all too easily with references to the historical world of the thirties. But for a considerable stretch *The Leavetaking* is well worth the perplexing time one has with it.

By contrast, the following *seems* like gossip:

> "Lisa's simply frantic. I'm afraid we won't keep her much longer." She sighed. "Oh God, those bloody foreign girls! Where have all the good servants got to?"
>
> "They never existed," said Mark. "It's a legend, a beautiful bourgeois legend."
>
> He looked at the sideboard. "Ah, my cure's coming along splendidly. Nothing with it, Joe, thank you."
>
> He looked more than usually spruce this evening—though it was still raining there was no sign of it on his person. But there was mud on Sybil's shoes and the neck of her purple dress was dark with moisture. She was unlucky in that way, unlucky in minor things, an attractor of small annoyances; Mark was one of the lucky ones, one of those who walked through rain without getting wet, who ate and drank just what he liked without putting on weight, whose dark good looks would be unchanged twenty years from now.

The veneer is unmistakable—Marquand so debased it must have been written by Charles Bracelen Flood. But in fact it is from John Braine's *Life at the Top,* a book that makes Flood seem like a writer of note. This is fake gossip; the squiggles called "Sybil" and "Mark" have no status independent of the whining sound of Joe Lampton, the narrator, who does not need to be interesting because of the impending arrival of that other composite vacuum, Laurence Harvey, to fill out the role. Weiss could have done something with a phrase like "one of those who walked through the rain without getting wet," but Braine lets it pass as genuine comment, which means it succeeds only as genuine cliché.

But Braine is not the only ex-Angry now peddling fake gossip:

> We could talk to each other as long as we were piano and trombone —not only talk to each other, but really communicate with our innermost minds. When I was playing my very best for Percy, rising on tiptoe in the effort to get somewhere near his stature, I was telling him my dreams and he was listening and telling me his.

Not only was this really first published in 1962, its author is John Wain, whose ability as a critical gossip is very considerable. His novels have never been as good as his letters and reviews, but still, *Strike the*

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Father Dead is a shockingly bad book. Wain not only pompously reports the news about a stern rational father and his eager creative son, he also focuses the son's eager creativeness on Percy, the American Negro trombonist above, who could be interesting only in a place where no novel about Negroes or jazz had ever appeared. But even there the writing would be called sloppy: "She was from Kentucky or somewhere like that, and her father owned four oil-wells, six diamond mines," etc.; "He was a doggy little man with a fair moustache, very fast-talking, full of gags, the ideal person to make a party go." The reader still determined to admire Wain can only move on very quickly.

Pamela Hansford Johnson has also been known to merit at least grudging respect, but her *An Error in Judgement* brings us no closer to genuine gossip. It does, however, help formulate a rule: a novel told by an obviously inadequate narrator about a hero ostensibly more fascinating than he will end with a gratuitous act of violence. It is easy to see how a gossip can become fascinated by the idea of having an extraordinary man described by an ordinary talker, but invariably the anxious novelist will try to bridge the gap between the two with a bloodletting. Such violence not only admits to novelistic failure as the gossip hurriedly tries to become a storyteller in the last thirty pages, but it also reveals obliviousness to the tortured struggles of Ford and Conrad with this very problem. They came as close to total success as *Lord Jim* and *The Good Soldier* before giving up the task and moving on to greatness; Lady Snow, thus, has little chance. *An Error of Judgement* is about a London doctor who demonstrates his own foulness to himself by tampering with various lives after he discovers he has great powers to prescribe to their secret ills. He might have been as convincing about his powers as he is about his foulness had he not adopted a sexual psychology as subtle and new as Krafft-Ebing:

> In the Medical Schools, I got a bit of peace, till I understood what I was up to. Pain and disease and death were not only permitted but obligatory; I looked on them with such a calm, shocked, delighted eye. Calm and shocked, one can be both. It's common. *Et puis?* (Excuse my French.) *Et puis,* I was there to help, I was there to overcome pain and disease and (up to a point) death. What a blessing that was! I could have my fate and eat it. Why did I take up medicine? To enjoy, I think, pain and disease and death. But also, to destroy them.

With a hero talking that way, no wonder Miss Hansford Johnson invented a chirruping narrator to tell the doctor's story. But hear *him:*

> People can go on for much longer than we think, some people until they die. That is where some novelists go so wrong. *Pauvres petits,* they believe there is always an answer, always a resolution. The majority of novels, it seems to me, end on a protracted coda, bang,

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bang, bang, Umpah, umpah, umpah, umpah:
Bang—
BANG!!
In fact, in a marriage, a murder, a suicide, a triumph, a disaster. The majority of lives, however, fade away gently without a noticeable peroration or a final curtain.

Pauvre petit narrator (the French in this novel could only have been written by one who has studied Proust deeply) does fade away gently, of course, but not before one murder is uncovered and a murder-suicide is arranged by the doctor as punishment. This is called having your fate and eating it.

So it is with something like relief that one turns to Brian Moore's *An Answer from Limbo*. It is a shame that Moore has been consistently praised and neglected because *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* and *The Feast of Lupercal* are stories of considerable power and *An Answer from Limbo* is not as good. The novel is about the consequences of Brendan Tierney's decision to bring his mother to New York from Ireland to stay with his children so that his wife can work so that he can quit work and finish his first novel: the mother takes over the household, baptizes the heathen grandchildren; the wife is driven into the arms of a punk; the mother is finally driven out and she slips, falls, and dies in her new apartment where she is all alone. Moore does not work hard enough at his story for it to be taken seriously, but the women are well done and Brendan at least keeps up the chatter:

> In the narrow trough of David Dortmunder's kitchen, a bag of ice cubes lay beside the sink, its mouth open like some strange brown fish. I looked at it, then passed on to the bottles of cheapest bourbon and vodka, the jumbo soda-water bottles, the carton of Cokes. A cheap party, drink delivered at the last minute from the Greenwich Village store which advertises as "The House of Instant Booze." And I, Tiresias Tierney, had seen it all, had been interchangeable host and guest, had walked among the lowest of the dead at these dead gaieties.

In the present context this qualifies as genuine gossip; the wit, to be sure, can only render gestures of self-contempt, but it gives us something to do while waiting for writers like Davis Grubb and Anthony Powell.

Let us imagine, say Grubb and Powell, not just one talker but a world whose very principle is talk. Each man may be locked within his own words, but this fact should be celebrated as well as understood as a limitation. Nothing can ever happen, of course, in a world in which everyone talks, so the American Grubb has twenty-eight narrators telling the same story and the Englishman Powell uses a listener

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for his narrator who is paralyzed because he is a listener. No self-contempt here, this is Heroic Gossip; *The Voices of Glory* runs to well over two hundred thousand words and Powell, of course, is into his sixth volume. Quite silly, this grand insistence, but admirable as well.

The epigraph for *The Voices of Glory* comes from Mother Jones, a labor agitator who died in 1931 at the age of one hundred and one (and whose autobiography, written when she was ninety-five, is not altogether reliable, says the *DAB*): "When I get to the other side I shall tell God Almighty about West Virginia." On this side, Davis Grubb is probably enough. He shouts like Wolfe, he writes and builds as fancily as Warren, he embraces the political idealism of the early Dos Passos as though it were the latest thing in ideas, he is as coyly fascinated by sexual aberration as Havelock Ellis—so when he insists that West Virginia is not really in the twentieth century, his every word bears him out. Marcy Cresap grows up hating disease and cynicism and marries a beautiful doctor with whom she does great works until the doctor dies of tuberculosis. Marcy then becomes bent on "revenge on the death that took my husband, Millard. Revenge on sickness, Millard, that stole two good years of my youth and kept me flat in a bed when I could have been out in Glory and in Apple County fighting." The novel is Marcy's life told by all those narrators—crooked town doctor, good country doctor, hypocritical preacher, honest town editor—if Mother Jones talked about West Virginia that way to the Almighty, He might just close down the shop. But there is magic in his well of absurdity undefiled, for Grubb has created a living town. Long after it was clear that nothing could ever happen in Glory, this reader was fascinatedly turning the pages, loving the rush of anecdote and revelation, grateful that someone who might be described as a combination of John O'Hara and Ayn Rand should be so unbothered by all that could be said against him. *The Voices of Glory* is a real test of one's love of gossip, and, for an evening or two of back country hokum, there has been nothing like it in years.

For reasons more absurd than anything that could ever happen in West Virginia, Powell's *The Music of Time* is becoming accepted as a great work. The latest volume, *The Kindly Ones,* opens with a pleasant unfresh reworking of that ubiquitous state of mind called England in 1914 and then contrasts it with England in 1939. Powell has nothing new to say about the Great War here; it has been clear all along that for him its most important result was a world in which Charles Stringham could not survive. Stringham has always had a magical effect on the pages of *The Music of Time*—the toasting of sausages and the foolery with LeBas at the beginning of *A Question of Upbringing;* the fine party in *A Buyer's Market* where Stringham reels round and about his hostess; the Old Boy dinner in *The Acceptance World* and the subsequent scene between Stringham and Widmerpool which is the series' finest moment to date. At these moments Powell's naive

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equation of awkwardness and power, grace and powerlessness, is elevated into an elegy for Stringham, and here Widmerpool, otherwise a crude creation indeed, is the perfect antagonist. But Stringham gradually disappears—in *The Kindly Ones* he is mentioned only once or twice—as the people who are taking over England take over the book. This is the necessary but now unfortunate consequence of insisting on the supreme importance of Nick Jenkins, whose singular capacity for listening makes him the ideal chronicler but also completely passive. He goes where he is taken, talks to whom he is with, and so huge tracts of the more recent books are taken up showing, in boring ways, that the World is Changing. There is a long section of *The Kindly Ones,* for instance, in which Nick learns through a series of conversations with Bob Duport that Jean Templer had been sleeping with a slob named Jimmy Stripling at the same time she had been Nick's mistress and Duport's wife. Once more Nick must face what he does not know how to face. The scene is handled very well by having Nick reflect, as Duport is talking, on a recent inheritance, *The Perfumed Garden of the Sheik Nefzaoui, or The Arab Art of Love.* The scene is very long, however, and finally it makes clear only that Nick is mechanically attracted and repelled by the news and by Duport's harsh and bored way of telling it. But Nick has been mechanically attracted and repelled by awkwardness and power and cynicism since he met Widmerpool in school and a machinating don in college. By rigidly adhering to the truth about gossips, which is that they never act and only record Change, Powell has committed himself to a narrative instrument far too insensitive to make more than the simplest kind of sense of the countless details of his society. The apparent carelessness of the design remains attractive, then, and its static quality at least makes sense out of Nick, but neither Nick nor Powell has anything like the subtlety or the adventurousness needed to sustain interest in a work of such length.

But he has, like Grubb and all the best gossips, invented some wonderful names—not since the big parties at West Egg has there been the like: in *The Voices of Glory,* Craven Quick, Clackey Barker, Other Johnson, Doctor Edward Everett Folansbee, "And I suddenly understood that filthy dirty ornery old man Gaily Rosebud," "Girls from the very nicest homes in Glory! Jobell Bosworth! Doris Ann Shrieves!"; in *The Music of Time,* Baby Wentworth, Anne Umfraville, Bijou Ardglass, once mistress to Prince Theodoric, Lady Molly Jeavons, and Powell's most essential sentence so far, "Isobel's eldest sister, Frederica Budd, who, since the recent death of the Tollands' stepmother, Lady Warminster, more than ever felt herself to be custodian of the family's moral and social standards, found Chip's 'paragraphs' particularly vexatious." Or there is this, when Sir Magnus Donners is directing a charade of the Seven Deadly Sins, " 'Now Lust, Peter. Do you want any help?' " So if the Large View sees Powell and Grubb acting like boys

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opening Christmas presents, the Small View, the page-by-page view, must insist they are fascinating.

Far from Glory and The City lies a land called California, so vast that no gossip can talk it into meaning. It is the home of Oakley Hall, a writer almost without talent who does one thing so very well that not even the most dedicated gossip can afford to ignore him altogether. Ten years ago it seemed that Hall might be able to tell the truth about California because he is a story teller, willing to move and change as well as be dazzled by the apparently infinite capacity for vulgarity of his surroundings. But in the face of massive praise and abuse he retreated, first to the Old West and now, in *The Downhill Racers,* to the caveman world of big time amateur skiing. The woodenness of his prose and his people show him to be perfectly at home there, but a good story can survive much and Hall is a pretty good storyteller. He knows what an event is, he can make things happen so that the range of things that can possibly happen changes. Here he tries to dramatize what happens to a poor decent man when told that winning races is the only thing he will ever be able to do well. Hall has no eye whatsoever for detail so it takes him far longer than it would a better writer to reach that point where his hero is caught in an act of friendship that is also an act of quitting. California is all but forgotten here and the outlines of Hall's fables grow simpler with each new work, but still, *The Downhill Racers* is a minor success and begins to offer an alternative, for those who want one, to gossip.

Hall's one talent is perhaps the only one that John Updike does not now have, but his new novel, *The Centaur,* shows that he is beginning to acquire it. I think Updike has been listening to those who said he should not continue to take life as he finds it, and he has seen that it is by means of story that he will come to frame life to his dimensions and still let it breathe. This is a singular discovery for one as good as Updike to make and in *The Centaur* are many signs that he may soon be not only a good writer but a superlative novelist. It is about a high school teacher of general science and his fifteen-year-old boy; it is done by retelling the myth of the centaur Chiron who, wounded yet immortal, gave up his life as an atonement for Prometheus' theft of fire. This weighty matter is handled scrappily rather than portentously—there is even an index to classical figures, which is great foolish fun. Updike still overwrites as often as he writes and *The Centaur* is woefully laden with setpieces which tend to lushness and pretentiousness and show that their author is still as much a writer of impressions as a novelist. Furthermore, the sections of the novel told by the boy Prometheus have a tendency to wander into the Further Adventures of John Updike. But Chiron, George Caldwell, is the largest, most interesting, and most novelistic character Updike has created, always appealing and sometimes heroic, and here the

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author's talent for always knowing what a character will say or do is the sign of a growing and humane imagination. The mechanics of the myth may clutter and make the tale cuter than it is meant to be, but it also seems to have released Updike from small scale work and to have let loose not only compassion but grandeur.

And if Updike still needs a model to show what care and patience can achieve, Ross Macdonald's *The Zebra-Striped Hearse* provides it. It has taken Macdonald ten years and as many novels, all about private eye Lew Archer, to learn finally how not to imitate Raymond Chandler. Chandler came close at times to being the great California fabulist, but his metier was the seedy and the criminal, and Macdonald has gradually created his own form, after a number of attempts to rewrite Chandler's, by turning to the lives of quiet bourgeois desperation that are the legacy of California's passionate belief in unreality. Anthony Powell uses coincidence marvelously to show how people who speak the same language are never far apart; Macdonald uses coincidence equally marvelously to show how a life gone out of control, moving as fast as California makes it move, must intersect with countless other lives of which it knows nothing. The only honest mode of address in such a world is the interrogative, and so Lew Archer asks questions and listens to answers which can be connected only by someone not committed to having a life himself. The plot is extremely complicated, but it is also the perfect instrument for rendering, question by question, the way pointlessness in Malibu leads to colonies in Mexico, Nevada, and other celebrations of the grotesque, and how these, in turn, lead to horror and violence. It is a limited and stylized mode, but it dramatizes, as few others can, genuinely contemporary experience—here violence is not gratuitous, sexual disaster has no overtone of the salacious, and heroism has no more than its just share of muscularity. Certainly if Updike develops as well as Macdonald has, he will achieve more than Macdonald ever could, but, and this is the point in this context, *The Zebra-Striped Hearse* is the work of a man who makes most gossips seem oblivious to everything except the sound of their own voices.

But even less plausible than the real news about California coming via private eye is the new Harper Prize Novel, *The Sand Pebbles,* by a retired navy machinist named Richard McKenna. It is a huge, creaking naturalistic work, written just as one would expect a machinist to write, but finally most impressive in its clear-eyed storytelling about an American gunboat in China during the twenties. The hero, Jake Holman, almost epic in his profound and unimaginative motion, loves machinery and hates the game that is the military. He is assigned to the *San Pablo,* which cruises between Hankow and Changsha protecting American treaty interests. The ship is kept in military shape by the magnificently military Lt. Collins and in perfect operational shape by a gang of coolies that leaves the petty officers with nothing to do

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except supervise and drill. For almost three hundred pages McKenna, acting as though it were the only thing that mattered, describes the melodramatic fight of Holman to renege on topside duties and to get closer to the machines. Then, just as Holman triumphs, McKenna beautifully expands the novel's sphere of vision to include the series of revolutions all along the Yangtze which makes the gunboat and the whole idea of melodrama obsolete. The old warlords are overthrown, the Kuomintang takes over and then is challenged by the Communists —the men on the gunboat are left with no enemy and no coolies to help them, Changsha is cut off from the treaty powers, Hankow is only a huddle of foreign concessions squeezed into submission by inflation. But this is at best dimly understood by the men on the *San Pablo,* and the most Holman can feel is left out by the suddenly purposeful Chinese. He sees a coolie he has taught destroyed because he had grown too close to the Americans, he watches a missionary girl gradually renounce statehood in order to become Chinese, he wants to desert but he is held to the military by the very blankness of his rage against it. The other men, wanting only to destroy someone, disintegrate, and Lt. Collins, blindly American and facing mutiny, risks everything on trying to save four missionaries who do not want to be saved. Holman is killed as the rescue is effected and "order" is restored.

McKenna is too ponderous and his sense of men caught in history is too inexorable for him to render these ironies sharply. If he ever read Melville or Conrad, he fortunately learned nothing from them, and his book is the first in years to offer a fresh view of naval command. He does not see why the naturalistic novel is such a bore—his book will be a best-seller, John Barkham will call it a blockbuster, William Holden will slog his way through a three hour film—and McKenna deserves all of it. But those who contend that this kind of book should never be written will be wrong too, for McKenna's sense of what happens to ordinary people trapped in extraordinary change is staggeringly accurate and rich. He knows as well as Cozzens how and why an operation works, but unlike Cozzens he has a sense of story and history, which is, though stripped of style and devoid of ideas in the usual sense, almost as compelling as Malraux's. To open *The Sand Pebbles* at any page and read a paragraph is to cry out for the highjinks of Powell or the stylishness of Ross Macdonald. But as the full telling of a large story it offers a real alternative to gossip, no hope whatsoever for the future of the novel or of McKenna, and a clear sense that a man possessed by a story is a strange beast, skulking outside the castle walls of our usual literary worlds, scornful or ignorant of all we have been trying to learn and teach, able to remind us that in literature as elsewhere, the integral vision is almost everything.

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ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS

A Little Tour of Henry James[1]

(A black and blustery winter's night in Washington Square; a sharp wind off the Hudson; scurrying pedestrians, a flicker of blown newspaper hurled through the gutter. The streetlights themselves seem cold; and in the background, under weak lamplight looms the icy arch of the monument.

Around the corner, bulky in his overcoat, bearded, big-browed, and bowler-hatted—yet curiously insubstantial—the apparition of Henry James is shadowed in a state of some agitation.)

(H.J.) Magnificent, magnificent—yes, of course it's magnificent. One ought to be grateful, I suppose, for a mausoleum in four volumes. Yet isn't it, after all, a merciless generosity of this sort that's bound to encompass one's most withering and abject catastrophe? The work of a lifetime reduced—in all generosity of feeling, mind you—to a mere symptom, a nervous disorder; ah, it's the final humiliation. After all, one ought to be entitled to one's perceptions, even if one is an author; I won't say, especially then. *He* has the last word, of course; but to be corrected in one's very affections—to be told that one's feeling for dear Lizzie Boott "was perhaps greater than he knew" (II, 111), or that one's view of Turgenev's view of one's work was contaminated by sibling rivalries (II, 213)—*enfin, c'en est trop.* If one's testimony in the mere matter of one's poor private affections is subject to correction, what, in the end, is the value of one's witness?

(The figure of Mr. Leon Edel, muffled against the cold and walking very fast, appears under the lamplight.)

(H.J.) Ahem! My dear Mr. . . . my dear fellow, could you possibly . . . would you be so good as to . . . ?

(Mr. Edel marches forward, squared determinedly against the blast, unhearing; he is heading for the subway. H.J., in desperation, springs forward, plants himself directly in his biographer's way, is unhesitatingly walked through, and watches the square, muffled figure disappear down the subway entrance. He remains so for some minutes, shaking his head and murmuring to himself. Only broken phrases and scattered words are audible.)

(H.J.) Ah, it's too much to look for; an impassable chasm. . . . But I would have liked to ask . . . perhaps to tell him. But no. . . . To have one's very lifelong defenses turned into weapons to attack one . . . to

[1] HENRY JAMES (Vol. II, THE CONQUEST OF LONDON; Vol. III, THE MIDDLE YEARS), by *Leon Edel.* Lippincott. $8.50 each. THE COMPLETE TALES OF HENRY JAMES (Vols. I-IV, 1864-1882), ed. by *Leon Edel.* Lippincott. $5.95 each. THE ORDEAL OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN HENRY JAMES, by *Dorothea Krook.* Cambridge. $8.50.

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have one's existence scrutinized through a keyhole for its very absence of passion; ah, it's too ignoble. . . . Yet, by his lights, the man's not been unfair. . . . His instinct is to create, arrange, dramatize; and what is one, in such a relation, but a poor, plastic *donnée*? . . . An arrangement with odd possibilities, this one; each of our actors cultivates an art which flourishes only at the expense of the other's. . . . Hmmm . . . must see what can be made of it. . . .

(He fades imperceptibly into the gusty darkness.)

The second and third volumes of Leon Edel's biography carry the persistent reader from the 27th to the 52nd year of Henry James's life; covering thus, in their 446 + 389 pages just twenty-five years of the novelist's career. To phrase the matter in this way is to imply excess—unfairly. Mr. Edel has been generous indeed with the details of a career tailored to ample and leisurely, if not precisely heroic, dimensions. But what is a biography for, if not to give us the details? A novelist whose perceptions come thick and fast, as did those of Henry James, is only to be sought through the recreation of his experience in its depth and complexity. There can be no question that Mr. Edel has learned more about Henry James than anyone but Henry James ever knew; and those who are acquainted with Mr. Edel's previous work will not need to be told that he has marshalled his facts into a lofty architecture and expressed them in trenchant prose. The villain in the piece is not his devotion to James or to the techniques of full-length biography; it is a not-fully-compatible devotion to mechanically Freudian notions of human motivation. It is this devotion which encourages Mr. Edel to think that he knows more of Henry James than Henry James himself knew—and against which the uncommitted critic is bound to protest.

Consider, for example, the matter of Henry's resentments against his father and older brother. These bulked large in the first volume of Mr. Edel's biography, where literary creation was not much in question; they continue to bulk large here, and when unleashed among the finely spun constructs of Henry's fictional imagination, they produce some pretty radical imbalances. From "Guest's Confession" (II,40) to *Roderick Hudson* (II,175) to "Confidence" (II,385-6) to *Washington Square* (II,399) to *The Bostonians* (III,144) to *The Princess Casamassima* (III,187-8), we are invited to think that Henry James was re-enacting and re-portraying psychic struggles against his father and his brother. In *The Princess Casamassima,* we are asked to believe that Diedrich Hoffendahl's "mutilated hand" (which may be altogether figurative) identifies him with the literally maimed Henry James Senior; further, that Hyacinth Robinson must placate this stern "father" by killing the Duke and thereby re-enacting his mother's murder of her lover and his father, Lord Frederick Purvis. "His im-

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mediate parent-surrogates, Miss Pynsent and Mr. Vetch, want him to cut loose from his revolutionary commitment. His 'parents' have put him in an impossible position. His big brother—in the shape of still another revolutionary, Paul Muniment—is of no help to him" (III, 191-2).

This passage is by no means representative of Mr. Edel's literary sensibility at its most felicitous, but the bare fact of its existence in the (presumably) definitive biography raises disquieting questions. Either these wiredrawn family allegories represent a considered element in James's view of the world, or they involve a compulsive, unconscious repetition of childhood traumas. One scarcely knows which alternative does more damage to the view of James as an intelligent constructor of significant fables. It is no accident, evidently, that Mr. George Steiner took the publication of Mr. Edel's latest volumes as an occasion to call for a much more moderate estimate of James as a literary artist. One may read this as an indirect, and doubtless unwelcome, tribute to the energy and ingenuity of the biographer.

Miss Constance Fenimore Woolson is a figure in the biography of Henry James who is, so to speak, Mr. Edel's own. Her existence had previously been known, to be sure; but Mr. Edel has been the first to represent (one chokes off the word "exploit") her sentimental importance to the novelist. Nothing is easier than to understand and sympathize with his sense of triumph at having uncovered a good deal of "material" which James went to great pains to conceal. Yet one might complain that the relationship which emerges is not a great deal subtler than that which some years ago seemed to be permanently established between Li'l Abner Yokum and Daisy Mae Scragg—she insatiably pursuing, he perpetually in panic flight. If that is where the documents take us, that of course is where we will have to go. Neither party can hope to emerge from such a relation with more than the shreds and tatters of personal dignity. But the figure of Henry James suffers an even more inward and intimate hurt; for the insufferable, unconscious, egotistical complacency which Mr. Edel assigns to him in this relation can leave us no respect whatever for his judgment either of manners or of sentiments. If what Mr. Edel tells us is the full story, no savage could have pursued his own selfish gratification more brutally, or with less sensitivity to the feelings of others, than did Henry James. He may be of interest henceforth for some other insights, some other qualities; but as an observer of human nature, a commentator on the civilized heart, he is revealed as an intolerable fraud. Mr. Edel will doubtless protest that this isn't what he meant at all. Of course it isn't; and just for that reason, it's all the more important that he has in fact established fully adequate grounds for this view of his hero—and altogether inadequate grounds for any other. By contrast, his formal critical estimate of James the novelist floats in the empyrean, quite without an evidential leg to stand on.

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To Mr. Edel's credit be it spoken, Freud is not usually invoked in the biography to help out in a struggle with refractory evidence; the most amazing Freudian arabesques are those which Mr. Edel cuts for their own sake. Take the matter of Turgenev, for instance; James himself is authority for the statement that Turgenev didn't care greatly for the Jamesian *oeuvre,* because he found it overdecorated. If this had in fact been the Russian's opinion, it would be too bad; but it would not be fatal, and indeed, nothing could be more likely *a priori.* Turgenev's style, Turgenev's habit of mind, were consistently plainer than James's; Turgenev didn't, as a matter of historical fact, praise James's novels enthusiastically, though he did like "Confidence," one of the worst, because he thought it simpler and less mannered than the others. Dear friends and sensitive men don't generally discuss one another's work with that utter forthrightness which is perhaps ideal; but a reticence has its meaning, and who, more than Henry James, may be supposed fit to interpret a reticence? Mr. Edel, however, clearly has his own answer to this question. Turgenev really appreciated James's writing; James, "in setting him up as an authoritative figure . . . may have seen him in the light of those other significant figures of his early experience, the candid critics of Quincy Street" (II, 213). Thus Henry James projected the criticisms of William James onto the personality of Ivan Sergeyevitch, and was so little aware of elementary realities that he left a gross misstatement of fact and intention to be picked up by his biographer at a distance in time of nearly a hundred years. What the distance is between the two points of view I wouldn't like to estimate.

Having said all these ungraceful things about Mr. Edel's biography, one can now, with a clear conscience, praise it. Fact is its *forte*—not fact narrowly defined as the laundry lists and rent-receipts of a great man, but the sights, smells, sounds, and images which shaped his imagination. As a cosmopolitan, James must be placed within his native habitat; and Mr. Edel is unsurpassed at the quick sketch of 19th-century "American colonies" in Rome, Florence, London, and Paris. One gets, from the biography, the textures and the solidities of existence which largely eluded James himself—a sense that the ladies wore crinolines, and the gentlemen beaver hats. One gets too a feeling that cosmopolitan living demanded a lot of energy in the days when the best way into Italy was a hike across the Simplon, and a transatlantic voyage took eight or ten days. Not the least of Mr. Edel's refreshing particularities derives from his study of Henry James's finances. We have accepted too long the image of a cushioned, supine, and plumply subsidized Henry James; he was, Mr. Edel now shows, a vigorous professional penman, cursed with a gift of style too fine for his age. But this did not prevent him from acting with flair and precision as his own business agent, or from taking an acute and practical interest in the sale of his books. Finally, Mr. Edel has inter-

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woven for us an account of the accidents and activities of the other James siblings, not just vigorous William, but Alice the invalid and the pathetic, defeated younglings, Garth Wilkinson and Robertson James.

By filling in these circumstances, then, Mr. Edel has enlarged, deepened, and rendered more available the world of Henry James. It is a world remote enough to be in some degree exotic, yet familiar enough to need no archaeology; in bringing it before us, Mr. Edel has exercised a broad vision and a firm control over his multitudinous materials. Yet to say that Henry James emerges from his biography with as many dimensions as his world would perhaps be putting it a little strongly. The fact is that he retains a certain click and rattle, as of a writing-machine; and the more Mr. Edel and other biographers enlarge our awareness of what went into it, the more painfully we are reminded of a certain failure of cornucopial variety in what came out. So long as we can think of James's stylistic and analytic finesse as a scalpel, probing ever deeper toward a center, all is well; when it imposes itself on us as a wall for blocking out (or, more painfully, as a bludgeon for destroying) one's awareness of humanity, however loosely defined, a revulsion is evidently in the making, which may well give rise to one of the prettiest critical Donnybrooks of the 1960's.

Meanwhile, the indefatigable Mr. Edel has been editing—with his left hand, no doubt—the *Collected Tales of Henry James,* projected for twelve volumes, of which the first four are at hand. Tales are, by James's definition, narratives focussed on a single individual, as distinguished from short novels, which fill a broader canvas. Mr. Edel's collection, it seems, will contain 112 of these tales when his long labors are over, as opposed to the mere 52 in the New York Edition. When possible, Mr. Edel reproduces the text of the first book appearance, in preference to a thoroughly rewritten text, such as one often finds specifically in the New York Edition; a good deal of the new material, too, has been collected from the files of those magazines in which it made its only previous appearance. All these stories are reproduced here, by Mr. Edel and the J. B. Lippincott Company, in a set of baronial dignity, the individual volumes of which are spacious, gracious, and easy to handle.[2] Mr. Edel's introductions are sensible and short. Even the reader whose flagging energies are appalled by the addition of still more mountains of material to the James canon, will be softened by his experience of the new tales. They are the graceful and humane foothills of Jamesian landscape. Their arrangement in chronological order provides the serious, sequential student with a

[2] It should be noted here that the New York Edition is itself being reissued by Scribner's in a series of handsome volumes. To date, the following ten volumes have appeared: RODERICK HUDSON; THE AMERICAN; THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY (in 2 vols.); THE PRINCESS CASAMASSIMA (in 2 vols.); THE TRAGIC MUSE (in 2 vols.); THE AWKWARD AGE; THE SPOILS OF POYNTON, ETC. $6.00 per volume.

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number of built-in panoramas and perspectives; while the browser, who prefers his James in bite-size chunks, will find much to delight his leisured fancy. Above all, the early tales are interesting as they show James handling rawer materials, with less technical assurance, to be sure, but with a frequent wit and warmth which would by no means have disgraced the Old Pretender. The sort of editorial work which Mr. Edel has undertaken in behalf of James's tales has not appealed very widely to students of American literature; we have very little on this side of the water, to set against Professor Chapman's authoritative Jane Austen or the glories of the Oxford English poets. Though he doesn't offer such exacting technical problems, James has long been in need of wholesale re-editing; the tales were a splendid place to start, and it is not beyond hope that other publishers and other scholars will before too long follow suit, with other authors.

Unfortunately titled, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* by Dorothea Krook is an introductory volume which analyzes seven works by the master. They are: *Portrait of a Lady, The Tragic Muse, The Turn of the Screw, The Awkward Age, The Sacred Fount, The Wings of the Dove,* and *The Golden Bowl*—this list itself representing, as will be felt, a nice compromise between the familiar and the *outré.* Dr. Krook writes for readers who aren't sophisticated beyond the need of having the story recited (sometimes rather baldly) for them; and, it may be felt, the devices of her analysis are sometimes measurably less subtle than the materials for which they are invited to account. Clear, vigorous, and emphatic, she brushes earnestly through the Jamesian web of nuance, imposing, as it seems to me, simplicity. Obviously, each of the seven topics is an argument in itself, and a package review is no place to conduct them. But a sampling of the issues may be gained from a few queries about Dr. Krook's proceedings with *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Wings of the Dove.* When she urges that Isabel Archer's ultimate disaster is rooted in the "presumption" of her lofty aspiration for experience (p. 42), there's a certain truth in this; no one can fall far without a certain preliminary elevation. But how does this fit in with the later statement (p. 57) that the lady's fault was to conceal her true self from Gilbert Osmond—was, in fact, the "low" vice of social hypocrisy? It seems hard to make both these qualities the pivot on which the novel's moral wheel turns. Indeed, though I see the first as much easier to maintain than the second, I doubt if one gets very close to the book by making *hubris* its turning point. Actually, Gilbert Osmond, as he's presented to us prior to Chapter 36, is a perfectly proper object for a rich young American lady to fall in love with; he represents no pinnacle for an overreacher to stumble while aspiring to. So that Isabel's *conduct,* one would argue, is hardly marked with *hubris* at all; the man she marries simply turns out to have a character utterly different from any which she or we could have conceived during the first 35 chapters of the novel. Thus the

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book's moral point lies neither in her character nor in Osmond's (if he has one), but in an arbitrary act of the author's. The *Portrait,* in a word, is richly laced with melodrama.

But Dr. Krook has some sense of having still insufficiently explained Isabel's character, and so adds that Miss Archer is fatally tainted with estheticism (p. 58)—being, in the event, punished for that. (One hadn't previously realized that estheticism was such an appalling crime.) On the other hand, it seems that Isabel can't possibly leave her hateful husband, because she takes an extravagantly ethical view of marriage. This makes her destiny rather special. She is just fool enough to marry the wrong man for the wrong reasons and just noble enough not to be able to get away from him for any reasons at all. One feels, in the presence of so many broadly overlapping explanations, all so clearly designed to rationalize a specific course of events, more than a passing reminiscence of Dr. Pangloss. Dr. Krook is determined to recognize in James's fiction only the best of all possible worlds.

With regard to *The Wings of the Dove,* it seems to me, Dr. Krook has lost her equilibrium on that slippery word "tragic," which she properly applies in its loose sense to certain events and sentiments of the novel and then feels obliged to justify in all its implications of dramatic structure. Feeling that the book is tragic, she looks about for a tragic hero or heroine, and settles on Milly Theale. But any reader of the book will recognize that Milly isn't, either as an actor or as a registering consciousness, at the center of the book—the point of which is precisely the radiance of her perceived presence within the darkened minds of Kate Croy and Merton Densher. Thus the basic contrast of the book isn't between Milly's New York (!) innocence and the worldly corruption of the Lancaster Gate folk; when one talks about her being "exposed to their destructive power" (p. 208), one is invoking precisely the wrong sort of pity for her. Kate and Merton aren't within Lancaster Gate; they are compromised, deeply compromised outsiders, trying to get in. Why else that brilliantly etched initial interview of Kate's with her unspeakable scapegrace father? Why the squalid Condrip menage in the immediate offing? Above all, why the splendid *coup de théâtre* which brings Book VIII to its cruel, cogent conclusion? These are all elements of Kate Croy and Merton Densher lying outside the cognizance, outside the toleration of Lancaster Gate. The only reason for insisting on this distinction is to ensure that Milly's radiance shall be shed, not on Lancaster Gate, which doesn't want, doesn't need, and wouldn't recognize it, but on the exclusive pair of triple hardened, desperately serpentine conspirators. The dove prevails most fully precisely where it's least probable that innocence would prevail, and only there. In a curiously separate analysis of Book X, Dr. Krook does full justice to the finely tempered quality of Merton Densher's consciousness—its scrupulous unscrupulousness, its deep, unconscious ground bass of moral receptivity. All the less reason to confound him

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with Aunt Maud, who's a horse, not only of another color, but of a different breed altogether.

Dr. Krook operates with a limited bibliography; she would probably have brought a different emphasis to the late novels had she made use of Christof Wegelin's sharp *Image of Europe in Henry James,* and might have given a very different impression of *The Portrait of a Lady* had she been aware of Richard Poirier's finely discriminating *Comic Sense of Henry James.* Further, I don't think she would have considered Edmund Wilson's old *Turn of the Screw* piece worth beating again, if she'd been aware of how many times it's already been assassinated. (It was hardly worth assassinating at all, if one gets in its stead nothing but a pietist lecture on the spiritual pride of the governess.) There's a *caveat* here for future Jamesians; the uncluttered book is great, but the book which either repeats or disregards already established ideas may turn out to be largely waste motion. No doubt it's ideal to present James without a surrounding snowstorm of *ibids* and *op cits;* but the sort of interpretation for which Dr. Krook pushes—sometimes, I feel, all too frontally—requires to be seen in some sort of perspective. And perspective, alas, is just what she doesn't sufficiently supply.

GERALD WEALES

The Man from the Midcult Is Here

DWIGHT MACDONALD, WHO TAKES EXCEPTION to Raymond Williams as a theoretician, said of *Culture and Society* that it "was interesting and valuable as long as it was specific." The same thing might be said of *Against the American Grain.*[1] Although Macdonald has strange lapses in taste, a number of dirty rhetorical tricks and a tendency to go on too long, face to face with an individual work, particularly one he can attack, he is often correct in his judgments (that is, he agrees with me) and amusing in presenting them. Unfortunately, he introduces his new collection of essays with the now famous *Partisan Review* article "Masscult & Midcult" and the rest of the book inevitably becomes part of the polemic.

Once upon a time—so begins the Macdonald story of the decline of culture—there existed a fine and workable division between high art

[1] AGAINST THE AMERICAN GRAIN, by *Dwight Macdonald.* Random House. $6.50.

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and folk art. Starting in the eighteenth century, stampeding in the nineteenth, masscult supplanted folk art, which, by Macdonald's definition, means that the impersonal replaced the individual, the produced-for-market edged out the self-created. Even if we pretend that folk songs are not as like one another as pop tunes are and even if we assume that it is more virtuous to sit around inventing "Barbara Allen" than listening to *Amos and Andy,* it is difficult to believe that most of the folk (later, the masses) were creators rather than consumers. If everyone is doing it, why the scops, the wandering fiddler, the itinerant carver of weather vanes? These figures have been succeeded, of course, by art and artifact centers (Nashville is one vast country-music factory) and there is loss in replacement. There is also gain, and the question—which is always asked whenever a picturesque slum is pulled down to be replaced by a clean, soulless housing development—is whether the gain is greater than the loss. So far as culture is concerned, Macdonald implies that it is not. He quotes a bookseller who, in 1790, was exulting that the "poorer sort of farmers" could read, that books had taken the place of told tales around the fireplace. Macdonald, rightfully suspecting the quality of those books, comments "perhaps the farmers should have stuck to their witches and hobgoblins," a remark which, in this context, looks very like a defense of illiteracy. Just beneath the urbanity, there is a snarl: the bastards, if they don't all read *Tom Jones,* they shouldn't read at all.

Only very occasionally does this attitude—strange for a man who not so long ago was going to raise the masses to new heights of intellection—break through the surface of Macdonald's argument. He has another and more dangerous villain, one that makes masscult almost acceptable. In a society in which there are strong cultural class lines (anglophile, he thinks he sees them in England), masscult can go its lemming way and leave high culture (I wonder why he doesn't call it *hicult*) uncorrupted. But in America, the immortal longings of the semi-educated (the college graduate, the television executive, the best-selling book publisher, the popular magazine editor) have created midcult, in which, for a fee, the aspiring reader, listener, looker can get the pleasure and the reputation of hicult experience of art without the pain and the effort. To escape the flood, those of us who care are asked to join Dwight Macdonald in a hicult tree-house where we can ignore the groundlings—even those who read *Horizon*—and write, paint and compose for one another. The monasteries may have preserved culture in the dark ages, as the old cliché used to say, but there was not much new art worth considering until the Renaissance brought artists back into the world, asked them to rub shoulders with balladmongers. Macdonald's longing for a hicult community capable of internal schism but untouched by the other cultural worlds is probably a reflection of his political past. Although he dismisses (but does not answer) the charge that he is a "disgruntled Left romantic," what

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he seems to be calling for is a cultural ghetto like the political ghetto of sectarian leftist politics which he said farewell to in *Memoirs of a Revolutionist.*

The two major flaws in the Macdonald structure are that he seems to think that men are, or ought to be, one thing only, and that he believes there is general agreement on what constitutes hicult artistic endeavor. I do not doubt that there are leisure sub-cultures—to use Herbert Gans's term—verifiable audiences about which one can make certain generalizations that relate attitude to income and education. I am just as convinced, however, that most men are a congeries of such sub-cultures, and the better for it. Macdonald's mythical graduate student who "will drop *Look* to pick up the *Kenyon Review* (or, more likely, the other way around)" has a better chance of understanding the best works of our presumed high culture than does an unlikely creature who reads only the quarterlies; really to understand *Ulysses* one would have to absorb as much *kitsch* as Joyce did. Macdonald, who seems to wish that American intellectuals would find their level and stay on it, deplores that they do not have "a very clear idea of their cultural identity." *Seems* only, I am afraid, for Macdonald spends more time with the products of masscult and midcult than most intellectuals I know.

Since for him the sub-cultures are value designations, he thinks he can serve the cause of art by pasting masscult, midcult and hicult labels on authors, painters, composers. It does not work that way, not even for Macdonald. He gives his seal of approval to some masscult artists—Chaplin, Dickens—and his gesture makes a little silly his preoccupation with *midcult* as a dirty word. He refers frequently to "certain standards" presumably accepted by all hicultists, by which serious art can be separated from the pseudo-serious. These are abstractions to be invoked only on prize-giving days. As far as I am concerned, *Our Town* (one of his horrible examples of midcult) has an intellectual content which uses and abuses the folksy surface Macdonald so despises, and *Last Year at Marienbad* (which he finds "interesting and admirable") is pretentious baroque chi-chi. His comfortable system should let him dismiss me as midcult and cuddle up with his own prejudices, an evasion which would be critically disastrous. The critic's job is not, as he says, "to discriminate between the true-good and the false-good," but between the bad and the good, and not only to discriminate, but to demonstrate. His job is not simply to belittle *Our Town* by parody (any fool can do that), but to criticize it so that I can be convinced of the error of my affection for it; my job is not to try to kill *Marienbad* in three words (any fool can do that), but to criticize it so he can be convinced of the error of his respect for it (I refer him to Vernon Young in the January *Arts Magazine*).

Having got this far, I cannot simply dismiss Macdonald as the mid-

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cult journalist he is (staff writer for the *New Yorker,* movie reviewer for *Esquire,* his book published by Bennett Cerf) because for me the term is not pejorative. I do not care where he writes or out of what motivation, but I do care that his otherwise "interesting and admirable" work is marred not only by his theoretic superstructure, but by a number of factual and stylistic flaws. I suspect the powers of observation of a man who, playing the level-game with American business publications, does not even mention *Business Week,* or who imagines that there are separate academic and lay worlds in literature (most of the stuff in little magazines is written by "academicians"), or who thinks that Mortimer Adler's Syntopicon reflects "the American academic mentality" (colleges think it a bigger joke than the *New Yorker* does). If Macdonald is right that ideas are inseparable from the words that express them, then his ideas must be in danger whenever his style becomes dishonest or inept. To say that the preparation of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible is "like taking apart Westminster Abbey to make Disneyland out of the fragments" is a stacked and false analogy, unnecessary because the correct one—the construction of a functional church—would be just as ugly. To introduce the Hollywood phrase "licking the book" and then spend two sentences explaining his witticism is to blunt the point he wants to make and insult his audience at the same time. The chief difficulty with these essays, however, is structural. Only a few of them are as disorganized as "Amateur Journalism," which wanders like a lost child who knows he is near his destination if he could just remember what it is. Usually the ideas are clear enough, but too often—see the reviews of the new Bible, of the new Webster's Unabridged, of how-to books—Macdonald does not know when to stop. His excesses may stem from his association with the *New Yorker,* which he praises for letting him take "the space he needs." Most of Macdonald's remarks about the *New Yorker* are laudatory, but he does slip in one criticism that puts a finger on his own weakness. In "The Triumph of the Fact," he comments sadly that *New Yorker* profiles "began thirty years ago as brief studies in personality and have grown steadily more encumbered with documentation." Fact-happy himself, he piles on example after example long after the reader is convinced and ready to move on. If two cigarettes can really kill a cat, why should Dwight Macdonald keep offering four to cats like James Gould Cozzens?

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